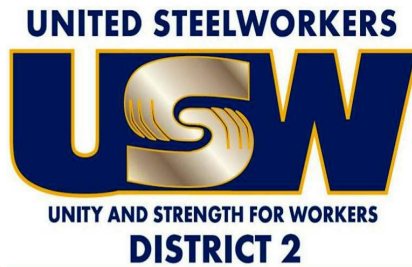




MICHAEL H. BOLTON, DIRECTOR



NEWS

MARCH 2021 • VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3 PAGE 1

DISTRICT 2 CONTACT INFORMATION

USW District 2 Office
1244A Midway Road
Menasha, WI 54952
(920) 722-7630

Northern WI & MI Sub-District Office
1244A Midway Road
Menasha, WI 54952
(920) 722-7630

Southern WI Sub-District Office
1135 South 70th Street, Suite 502
West Allis, WI 53214
(414) 475-4560

Northern MI Sub-District Office
503 North Euclid Avenue
Suite #10 - Euclid Plaza
Bay City, MI 48706
(989) 667-0660

Southern MI Sub-District Office
20600 Eureka Road, Suite 300
Taylor, MI 48180
(734) 285-0367

USW District 2 Council Steering Committee

The District 2 Council By-Laws established a District 2 Council Steering Committee comprised of a rank and file structure. It was set up to assist in the following:

- Development of agenda for Council Conference.
- Planning of the District Council Conference Educational Conferences.
- District 2 strategic planning.
- Determining and assessing educational needs within the District.
- Generating and leading activism and other purposes consistent with the mission and directives of District 2 and the USW.

The elected members of the Steering Committee are listed below by manufacturing sector. If you need to contact a Steering Committee Member, please do so by using the email provided below.

Name	LUF#	Sector	Email Address
Ron Fancsal	1299	Steel and Related	rfancsal@yahoo.com
Don Carlson	58	Paper	doncarlson@gza.net
Robert Desmond	13792	Amalgamated	rdesmond@sl.com
Jesse Edwards	2-232	Automotive Related	Jesse_edwards21919@yahoo.com
Kent Holzing	12075	Chemical & Energy Related	kentholzing@gmail.com
Jackie Anklam	9899	Health Care	jackieanklam_uswlocal8999@yahoo.com
Michael Orvoosh	12854	Public	m.orvoosh@uswlocal12934.com
Eric Henricks	1327	AI Large	Eric.henricks@allianceai.com
Matthew Gibbons	5965	AI Large	ms5965@gmail.com
Jim Whitt	2-145	Allied Industrial	whittjm@yahoo.com



United Steelworkers District 2 AFL-CIO-CLC

MICHAEL H. BOLTON, Director
1244A Midway Rd., Menasha, WI 54952
(920) 722-7630

Contributors to this issue include:
Lori Gulekunst, Tammy Duncan, Jay McMurray,
Thomas Conway, USW International President, USW New Media
AFL-CIO: History.com, Todayinlaborhistory.com
Janelle Bouie, The New York Times

Articles and photos are welcome and should be sent:

Jason Wilcox & Art Kroll, Co-Editors, District 2 News
1244A Midway Rd., Menasha, WI 54952
d2@usw.org • (920) 722-7630

April 23, 2021, is the deadline for submissions for the next issue.

A Message from Michael Bolton



Organizing has always been the best way to build the Union. But, in order for Unions to actually make that happen, Congress must first act to reform our outdated labor laws. The laws we are currently

Operating under are 86 years old and have become more limited by decades of administrative and court actions to the point where they no longer protect workers or their right to join a Union and to negotiate a fair contract.

The good news is now, after the election, Democrats took control of the House, Senate and the Executive branches of government. Meaning we have a better than average chance of making the PRO Act law. The bill was passed in the House on March 11 and has been forwarded to the Senate for consideration. The challenge this time is that Democrats hold a slim one seat advantage in the upper chamber and will need help to get the bill to a vote and to stop a filibuster. This is going to take some Republican help to get it done. Convincing GOP moderates to support our movement is going to be a heavy lift. However, if we all work together, it is something we can get done. As a matter of fact, it is something we must get done!

This landmark legislation would remove barriers to forming a union while protecting workers and strengthening retirement security.

The Act originally passed the House in February of 2020, where it was DOA in the GOP-led Senate. At the time, The Washington Post called it "One of the most significant bills to strengthen workers' abilities to organize in the past 80 years." Now, with Democrats back in control, the bill has been reintroduced into Congress.

The PRO Act would go a long way toward restoring workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively by streamlining the process for forming a union, ensuring that new unions are able to negotiate a first collective bargaining agreement, and holding employers accountable when they

violate worker rights.

A strong and growing labor movement has been, and continues to be, the leading force in the fight to strengthen Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and ensuring a measure of retirement security for all Americans. Our country, our democracy, and our economy benefit when workers have a strong voice at work and are able to join together to build a more secure future for their families and communities.

PRO Act streamlines the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election process so workers can petition to form a union and get a timely vote. It prohibits employer interference of any sort, including delaying the vote or forcing workers to attend mandatory anti-union meetings as a condition of continued employment. An employer that breaks the law or interferes with a fair election could be compelled to bargain with the union. The PRO Act also requires employers to disclose payments to outside union busters.

The PRO Act extends labor wage and hour protections to more workers, including many who have been misclassified as "independent contractors" by their employers. This is important given the rise in contracting jobs and workers who have jobs with more than one employer.

The PRO Act institutes civil penalties for those who violate labor laws, including corporate officers and directors. It also provides for compensatory damages to workers. Workers seeking relief in the courts would have job and paycheck protections while their case is pending.

Existing law requires employers to bargain in good faith, but in practice, employers often drag out the bargaining process to avoid reaching a contract, discouraging workers in the process. The PRO Act establishes a process to reach a first contract, including the use of mediation and, if necessary, binding arbitration to reach a contract.

Currently, if workers strike, employers can permanently replace them. Courts have prohibited workers from boycotting secondary companies doing business with their employer.

— continued on page 2 —

"GO BUILD OUR UNION!"

Did you know?

U.S. employers are charged with violating federal law in

41.5%

of all union election Campaigns

“Let the workers organize. Let the toilers assemble. Let their crystallized voice proclaim their injustices and demand their privileges. Let all thoughtful citizens sustain them, for the future of labor is the future of America.” - John L. Lewis

10.2%
of women workers are represented by a Union

President Harry S. Truman called the Taft-Hartley Act a “dangerous intrusion on free speech.”



The Union Plus Credit Card program.
With 3 card choices - designed to meet the needs of union members. All with competitive rates, U.S. based customer service and more. Plus, exclusive hardship grants for eligible cardholders*.

The Union Plus Credit Card Program is designed to meet the needs of hard-working union members and their families.

To apply by phone, call: **1-800-522-4000**



United Steelworkers District 2 AFL-CIO-CLC

MICHAEL H. BOLTON, Director, 1244A Midway Road, Menasha, WI 54952 (920) 722-7630

HAVE YOU BEEN TO DISTRICT 2'S PAGE ON FACEBOOK?
www.facebook.com/USWDistrict2

A Message from Director Bolton - continued from page 1

The PRO Act repeals the prohibition on secondary boycotts and prohibits employers from permanently replacing strikers with new workers.

We help our cause and our communities when we stand in solidarity with those seeking to form unions and improve the lives of working families. Now is the time to have our voices heard to ensure the rights of our children and grandchildren are preserved, so they will work in safe conditions and will earn fair wages and benefits. Now is the time to urge our elected officials in Washington to pass the PRO Act.

Now is the time to go build our Union!

Observe Workers' Memorial Day April 28 • Pass the Pro Act



FIFTY YEARS AGO on April 28, Workers' Memorial Day, the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect, promising every worker the right to a safe job. The law was won because of the tireless efforts of the labor movement, which organized for safer working conditions and demanded government action. Unions and our allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality - winning protections that have made jobs safer and saved lives. But our work is not done. Each year, thousands of workers are killed and millions suffer injury or illness because of dangerous working conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the inextricable link between workplace safety and health and our communities. The virus has killed more than 500,000 people in this country so far - devastating working families, with a disproportionate impact on people of color. Unions and our allies stepped up to demand and win job protections from this highly contagious virus. We organized for safe jobs and the right to speak out against unsafe working conditions. We demanded access to the ventilation, respirators and other measures that protect workers from inhaling the virus at work. Given the lack of federal action, unions won protections in states and held state and local leaders accountable. Organized labor and our allies were key to strengthening job safety to save lives.

Worker safety and workers' voice go hand in hand. The popularity of unions is at 65%—one of the highest marks since the OSH Act was implemented in 1971—and 60 million nonunion workers say they would vote for a voice on the job today. That is why America's labor movement is leading the campaign to pass the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which would give all workers who want to form a union a fair path to do so. Strong unions hold employers and the government accountable to keep workers safe. Strong unions raise the baseline level of job safety protections for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the lack of resources and accountability for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) to ensure workers are protected on the job, as well as the structural failures that have prevented workers from organizing for safer working conditions. Workplace safety agencies have been hollowed out with a reduction in staff and a stagnant budget. Many workers never see OSHA in their workplace. Penalties are too low to be a deterrent. Workers are not adequately protected to speak out against unsafe working conditions and to join a union without retaliation. As we look to the next 50 years of national worker protections, Congress must strengthen workplace safety agencies to renew their promise to working people, and issue life-saving protections against workplace violence, infectious diseases, heat illness, silica in mining and toxic chemicals—preventable hazards that kill tens of thousands of workers each year.

On April 28, the unions of the AFL-CIO will observe Workers' Memorial Day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job, and to renew the fight for safe jobs. We will mobilize to pass the PRO Act, so workers have a voice on the job. We will stand united to strengthen workers' rights and protections, and demand resources and actions needed for job safety enforcement. We will fight for the right of every worker to a safe job, until that promise is fulfilled.

"GO BUILD OUR UNION!"



2021 District 2 Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

- 1 **LM Review Virtual Workshop - Wisconsin (12:00 noon CST)**
LM training will be offered via Zoom. Information will be mailed in January.
- 2 **LM Review Virtual Workshop - Michigan (1:00 p.m. EST)**
LM training will be offered via Zoom. Information will be mailed in January.

MARCH

District 2 2020 Collective Bargaining Course - Virtual Training for Locals that have contracts expiring before April 2022
Seven-week course held every Tuesday night or Wednesday morning beginning March 9 & 10, 2021. Classes will be held via Zoom. Detailed information will be sent out soon.

APRIL

- 6 **WOS Virtual Quarterly Meeting (WI)**
*9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon OR 5:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. (CST)
Zoom link provided when registration is received.*
- 7 **WOS Virtual Quarterly Meeting (MI)**
*9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon OR 5:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. (EST)
Zoom link provided when registration is received.*

JUNE

Paper Council Meetings
Dates to be Determined

TENTATIVE D2 Legislative Conference
Dates and Details to be provided later

JULY

- 20-22 **Virtual National Paper Bargaining Conference**
Information will be mailed soon.

Important Notices From District 2

We apologize for any inconvenience, but the USW District 2 offices are temporarily closed. However, the health and safety of our members and staff is our number one priority.

We are committed to doing our part to prevent the further spread of covid-19 while still representing our members. If you need assistance, you can still call each office; or, call your Staff Representative.

Important Notice

2021 Women of Steel Leadership Development Course

POSTPONED

The safety and health of District 2's members and staff remains a top priority. Therefore, due to the current state of the pandemic, it has been decided to postpone this year's District 2 WOS Leadership Development Course until May of next year (2022).

Notice from the United Steelworkers International Executive Board

On Friday, February 19, the International Executive Board (IEB), in accordance with the provisions of the International Constitution, unanimously voted to merge the District 2 state of Michigan with the state of Ohio in District 1 and the District 2 state of Wisconsin with Illinois and Indiana in District 7.

After many years of great service to the union, District 2 Director Mike Bolton announced his intention to not seek re-election in November of this year and to retire in March of 2022.

The IEB took this action to streamline the union's footprint, to better align the geography of the union and to strengthen the density of our districts. This step will position the union well into the future to continue to meet the challenges working families face every day and to ensure a viable and influential presence across our sectors and in various state legislatures.

The USW will be communicating further details to our local union leadership in the coming days and weeks as we begin working through the necessary steps to ensure what we anticipate will be a smooth and transparent transition.

The schedule is designed to assist in planning this year's events. However, there is a possibility dates and/or locations could change due to unforeseen circumstances. Changes and corrections will be made ASAP and updated on the USW District 2 website.

Letter from USW International Executive Board • Mailed to the Membership of Districts 1, 2 & 7 on March 2, 2021



March 2, 2021

To: Local Union Presidents and Recording Secretaries

On Friday, Feb. 19, the International Executive Board (IEB), in accordance with the provisions of the International Constitution, unanimously voted to merge the District 2 state of Michigan with the state of Ohio in District 1 and the District 2 state of Wisconsin with Illinois and Indiana in District 7.

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Probably the most significant impact to the local unions will be the change in voting in the November election for International Officers and Directors. While the selection of the other International Officers will not be affected by this change, members will now vote for their District Director in the newly redrawn Districts 1 and 7. At a later date, when the election of International Officers instruction letters are sent out to each local union, these district changes will be incorporated.

As to any changes to programs, servicing and other district-based functions, there will be a gradual and open process over the coming months consulting with Directors Bolton, Blatt and Millsap, as well as the USW staff and the local unions. During this time, we will blend the best of what each district and state has to offer. We are certain that by March of 2022 the new districts will be fully functional, having had a chance to get to know each other and joined by a common sense of purpose, solidarity and camaraderie.

We will continue to communicate with you throughout this process over the coming months. Given the ongoing uncertainty related to COVID-19, this will take many forms including email, virtually, and in person. This is something we want to do together so that together we build a stronger union going forward.

In solidarity,

Thomas M. Conway

International President

John E. Shinn

International Secretary-Treasurer

Michael H. Bolton

Director, District 2

Michael R. Millsap

Director, District 7

Donald E. Blatt

Director, District 1

United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union

60 Boulevard of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222 • 412-562-2400 • www.usw.org

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF BROTHERHOODS OF AMERICA
3857

"GO BUILD OUR UNION!"

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW News
UNITY AND STRENGTH FOR WORKERS

For Immediate Release:
March 22, 2021

Contact: Jess Kamm Broomell,
412-562-2444, jkamm@usw.org

USW Applauds Confirmation of Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, Welcomes Opportunity to Work with Biden Cabinet

(Pittsburgh) – The United Steelworkers (USW) union today applauded the confirmation of Marty Walsh as secretary of labor, hailing his appointment as yet another victory for working people.

“As a longtime member of the labor movement, Marty Walsh understands what’s at stake for working families as we seek to rebuild our economy in the wake of the pandemic,” said USW International President Tom Conway. “He’s proven that he’s willing to fight to ensure workers’ needs and rights are always top priorities.”

With Walsh’s confirmation, President Joe Biden’s cabinet is now nearly full, and the union also said that it looked forward to working with all of President Biden’s recently confirmed cabinet members: Pete Buttigieg as transportation secretary, Jennifer Granholm as energy secretary, Gina Raimondo as commerce secretary, Michael Regan as head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Katherine Tai as United States Trade Representative, Janet Yellen as treasury secretary, and many others.

“This is an experienced and extremely capable team. Individually, each of these members of the new administration have proven their commitment to advancing the interests of workers and their families,” said Conway, “but collectively they will be a formidable force as we work to rebuild our nation’s crumbling infrastructure, revitalize our long-neglected supply chains, revive our country’s manufacturing muscle, and ensure widespread, shared prosperity for all Americans.”

The USW represents 850,000 workers employed in metals, mining, pulp and paper, rubber, chemicals, glass, auto supply and the energy-producing industries, along with a growing number of workers in health care, public sector, higher education, tech and service occupations.

###

This Month in Labor History: March 1933 • Roosevelt Appoints Secretary of Labor - [By todayinlaborhistory.tumblr.com](https://todayinlaborhistory.tumblr.com)

On March 4, 1933, Frances Perkins is appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Secretary of Labor.

Legislation brought about under her administration included the National Labor Relations Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Social Security Act.

Perkins was the first woman Cabinet member and worked in that position for twelve years.



Biden Is Saying Things Amazon Doesn't Want to Hear - By Jamelle Bouie, Opinion Columnist, The New York Times, March 2, 2021 • Page 1 of 2



Michael Foster, a union representative, outside the Amazon facility in Alabama where workers are voting on whether to unionize. Credit...Jay Reeves/Associated Press

The unionization struggle at a year-old warehouse in Alabama will help shape the future of work.

For a few minutes on Sunday night, President Biden sounded a little like a union leader. "Unions put power in the hands of workers," he said in a video statement of support for the union drive at an Amazon fulfillment center in Bessemer, Ala. "They level the playing field. They give you a stronger voice for your health, your safety, higher wages, protections from racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Unions lift up workers, both union and nonunion, but especially Black and Brown workers."

Biden also spoke directly to employers who might try to subvert or sabotage an organizing drive. "There should be no intimidation, no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda. No supervisor should confront employees about their union preferences. Every worker should have a free and fair choice to join a union. The law guarantees that choice. And it's your right, not that of an

employer, it's your right."

Biden is not the first president to speak in support of unions, but he may be the first to speak so publicly — and so directly — in their favor (certainly since Harry Truman). The words themselves are ordinary, but the context, an American president speaking in support of the most high profile organizing drive in the country, makes them extraordinary. And that, in turn, raises expectations for what Biden can and should accomplish as president on behalf of the labor movement.

Typically, Democratic presidents aren't so specific in their support for organized labor. Barack Obama, for example, stuck to platitudes at his 2015 White House summit on "worker voice." "Labor unions were often the driving force for progress," he said, "The middle class itself was built on a union label. And that middle class that was built was the engine of our prosperity."

Before Obama, Jennifer Klein, a professor of history at Yale, wrote by email, "Presidents Carter and Bill Clinton basically didn't even believe there should be unions. They saw them as relics of a decidedly different era of American capitalism. Unions didn't really function in a modern economy. Free trade, 'knowledge', and new technologies would eliminate that old politics of class conflict and the need for much of the New Deal apparatus."

Even Franklin Roosevelt was, as the historian William E. Leuchtenburg wrote in 1963, "somewhat perturbed at being cast in the role of midwife of industrial unionism." When pressured by events to take a side in the "Little Steel" strike of May 1937 — in which steel workers under the C.I.O. and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee clashed with a group of independent steel producers, their strikebreakers and law enforcement — Roosevelt blanched. "The majority of people are saying just one thing," the president said. "A plague on both your houses."

Compare this to Biden, who stepped in during an organizing drive and ongoing union election to support workers, rebuke hostile employers and remind the country that the federal government has an obligation to allow or even encourage union organizing. Relative to the rhetoric of most of his predecessors, Biden's brief address stands as one of the most pro-union statements ever issued from the White House.

What is also striking is how the president's statement reflects the changing nature of the labor movement. Biden says explicitly that unions help protect workers from sexual harassment and racial bias, and he ties the fight for union representation to the nation's "reckoning on race" and the "deep disparities that still exist in our country."

It is worth saying that the majority of workers at the Amazon facility in Bessemer are Black, and a large proportion of them are women. Across the country, Black and Hispanic workers, especially women, are at the forefront of struggles for higher wages and greater dignity. Unions are diverse, and unionized workers are no longer just the hard hats and stevedores of the industrial age.



Mona Darby, a union representative, working in December as part of the campaign to unionize Amazon's fulfillment center in Bessemer, Ala. Credit...Bob Miller, The New York Times

— continued on bottom of page 7 —



For Immediate Release:
March 24, 2021

Contact: Jess Kamm Broomell,
412-562-2444, jkamm@usw.org

USW Welcomes EPI Report Highlighting Need for Continuing Section 232 Relief

Trade Remedies Remain Vital to National Security, Economic Recovery

(Pittsburgh) – [United Steelworkers \(USW\) International President Tom Conway issued the following statement in response to today's Economic Policy Institute \(EPI\) report on the continuing need for Section 232 relief:](#)

“The USW welcomes the EPI’s rigorous research into the impacts of the steel 232 measures and the dire consequences of lifting them prematurely.

“Tens of thousands of USW members depend on a robust U.S. steel industry for good, family-sustaining jobs, doing vital work that helps ensure our national security.

“Our members take pride that our steel is used in military vehicles such as tanks, ships and airplanes, as well as supplying the components that make up our nation’s critical infrastructure.

“The Sec. 232 measures helped significantly curb imports, allowing domestic producers a chance to expand production, employment and capital investment. It is especially important that they are able to continue this work, given the fragile economic recovery in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Excess global steel capacity also remains a significant problem, as it was before the Sec. 232 measures were enacted.

“It is imperative that these protections remain in place until the administration is able to find a permanent, multilateral, enforceable solution to address steel overcapacity and unfair trade.”

The full report can be found [here](#).

The USW represents 850,000 workers employed in metals, mining, pulp and paper, rubber, chemicals, glass, auto supply and the energy-producing industries, along with a growing number of workers in health care, public sector, higher education, tech and service occupations.

###

Biden Is Saying Things Amazon Doesn't Want to Hear - By Janelle Bouie, Opinion Columnist, The New York Times, March 2, 2021 • Page 2 of 2 • continued from page 6

“That is the old imagining of the union base,” said Kirsten Swinth, a professor of history at Fordham University. “But that’s not the reality of the American labor movement today. When Biden speaks out the way he does, he is speaking to the working class that has come into being since the 1970s.”

Presidential rhetoric is not all powerful, but it does matter. Biden’s statement will almost certainly reverberate through future organizing campaigns, to be used against hostile employers. It also plants a flag for the Democratic Party, not just in favor of unions generally but worker power specifically. And to that end, it raises the urgency for pro-union executive action and pro-worker legislation.

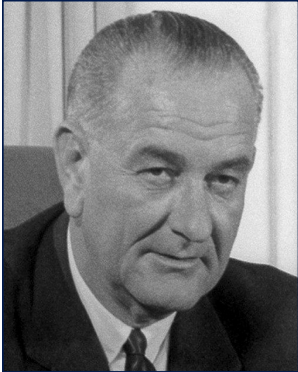
On his own, Biden can raise the minimum wage for federal contract employees to \$15 per hour, require contracts to go exclusively to employers who remain neutral in union elections and temporarily bar contracts for employers who illegally oppose union organizing. He can also, pending Senate confirmation, fill vacancies on the five-member National Labor Relations Board, which sets rules for collective bargaining, conducts and certifies union elections, and adjudicates labor disputes. A Democratic majority on the board — achieved by filling both an existing vacancy and a scheduled one in August — would allow Biden to reverse anti-union rulings from the Trump era and begin to make the government less hostile to labor rights.

The surest way to bring about major change, however, is through legislation. Last year, the House of Representatives passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, which would grant workers new collective bargaining rights as well as penalize employers that retaliate against workers who organize.

The obstacle here isn’t Biden, however, it is the Senate and its supermajority requirement for legislation. And with that in mind, perhaps the best thing Biden’s rhetoric can do beyond the specific situation in Alabama is put a little more pressure on Democrats to bring majority rule to the chamber and let Congress finally govern on behalf of the country and its workers.

"GO BUILD OUR UNION!"

This Month in History • 1965 - President Johnson Calls for Equal Voting Rights - *History.com*



On March 15, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson addresses a joint session of Congress to urge the passage of legislation guaranteeing voting rights for all.

Using the phrase "we shall overcome," borrowed from African American leaders struggling for equal rights, Johnson declares that "every American citizen must have an equal right to vote." Johnson reminds the nation that the Fifteenth Amendment, which was passed after the Civil War, gave all citizens the right to vote regardless of race or color.



But states had defied the Constitution and erected barriers. Discrimination had taken the form of literacy, knowledge or character tests administered solely to African Americans to keep them from registering to vote.

"Their cause must be our cause too," Johnson said. "Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."



The speech was delivered eight days after racial violence erupted in Selma, Alabama. Civil rights leader John Lewis and over 500 marchers were attacked while planning a march from Selma to Montgomery to register African Americans to vote.

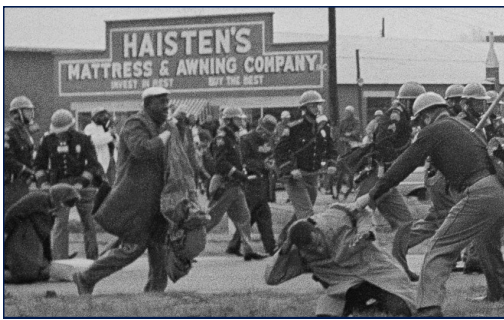
The police violence that erupted resulted in the death of a King supporter, a white Unitarian Minister from Boston named James J. Reeb. Television news coverage of the event galvanized voting rights supporters in Congress.

A second attempt to march to Montgomery was also blocked by police. It took Federal intervention with the "federalizing" of the Alabama national guard and the addition of over 2,000 other guards to allow the march to begin.



The march to Montgomery finally began March 21 with over 3,000 participants under the glare of worldwide news publicity.

The violence, however, continued. Just after the march was successfully completed on March 25, four Klansmen shot and killed Detroit homemaker Viola Liuzzo as she drove marchers back to Selma.



On August 6, 1965, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which made it illegal to impose restrictions on federal, state and local elections that were designed to deny the vote to Black Americans.

While state and local enforcement of the act was initially weak, mainly in the South, the Voting Rights Act gave African American voters the legal means to challenge voting restrictions and vastly improved voter turnout.

In Mississippi alone, voter turnout among Black voters increased from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon extended the provisions of the Voting Rights Act and lowered the eligible voting age for all voters to 18.





MESSAGE FROM PITTSBURGH



Thomas M. Conway, International President

Posted: March 18, 2021 • page 1 of 2

Ending Callous Delays

Workers at Solvay's Pasadena, Texas, plant voted overwhelmingly to join the United Steelworkers (USW) in 2017 and looked forward to sitting down with the company to quickly negotiate a fair contract.

Solvay decided to play games instead.

Company representatives canceled some bargaining sessions at the last minute, took two-hour lunches on days they did show up, dithered for weeks over the union's proposals and pulled every stunt imaginable to drag out the talks and frustrate the workers into giving up.



Getty Images

"They were angry that we actually had the audacity—in their mind—to challenge them with a union. This was their way of getting back at us," said USW Local 13-227 President Steve "Tote" Toto, noting the spiteful antics cost him precious time with his wife, Mary, who was dying of pancreatic cancer about 1,500 miles away.

The U.S. House just passed bipartisan legislation to end shenanigans like this and help ensure that workers achieve the fair contracts they earned.

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which faces an uphill battle in the Senate because of a lack of Republican support, would better protect workers from illegal bullying and retaliation during the organizing process.

And once workers vote to form a union, the PRO Act would set timelines for progress toward a contract and impose mediation and binding arbitration when employers stall and delay.

Although Toto and his co-workers achieved an agreement in January 2019—after more than a year of fighting—corporate foot-dragging on contract talks continues to worsen nationwide.

Right now, companies resort to stall tactics so often that about half of all workers who organize still lack a contract one year later. Worse, 37 percent of workers in newly formed private-sector unions have no agreement after two years. And some continue fighting for a first agreement long after that.

The PRO Act, which President Joe Biden hails as essential for leveling the playing field for workers and rebuilding the middle class, will spur employers to show up at the bargaining table and reach agreements as expeditiously as possible.

That's exactly what would have helped Toto and his colleagues four years ago.

The workers at Solvay organized to obtain safer working conditions and a voice at the chemical plant, recalled Toto, who relocated to Pasadena after the company closed the Marcus Hook, Pa., facility where he originally worked. His wife, already battling cancer, remained in the couple's Philadelphia area home to be in comfortable surroundings and stay close to her doctors.

Talks stretched out month after month as Solvay's negotiators refused to schedule regular bargaining sessions, made onerous proposals solely intended to bog down the discussions and even balked at excusing workers for jury duty. But nothing infuriated union members as much as finding the company's chief negotiator asleep one day in a room where he had ostensibly gone to study union proposals.

"It's about discouraging you," Toto said of the company's ploys. "It's about breaking you down. It was also frustrating for me because it was taking time away from the last year I had with my wife."

Just like Toto and his colleagues, workers at the Bishop Noa Home in Escanaba, Mich., made modest demands that they expected to speedily resolve at the bargaining table.

Yet more than three years after voting to join the USW, the 55 certified nursing assistants and dietary, environmental services and laundry workers continue fighting for a contract even as they put their lives on the line to care for the facility's residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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MESSAGE FROM PITTSBURGH



Thomas M. Conway, International President

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Ending Callous Delays

The home refuses to accept the workers' choice to organize. It brought in a union-busting attorney who belittles workers at the bargaining table, makes unreasonable proposals, spurns efforts to bring the parties together and drags out talks to try to break the workers' morale.



Marcia Hardy

Marcia Hardy, a dietary worker who's dedicated 35 years to Bishop Noa, said she and other negotiating committee members repeatedly made good-faith compromises that they felt certain would speed talks along.

"That didn't happen," she said, noting the home not only rebuffed the workers' good will but refused to budge from its own proposals.

"They don't want to have to answer to anybody but themselves," Hardy said of the facility's efforts to silence workers. "They will not give that up for anything. It's just so disheartening because you've put your heart and soul into the place."

Throughout the pandemic, workers have been putting in extra hours, taking on additional responsibilities and serving as surrogate family members to residents cut off from loved ones, all so Bishop Noa can continue providing a top level of care. And although a contract would afford opportunities for building on that record of excellence, Hardy said, Bishop Noa prefers to wage war on workers instead.

She and her colleagues, who have widespread community support, will keep fighting for the agreement they earned. "If I give up," Hardy said, "they win."

Solvay, Bishop Noa and other employers that drag out negotiations squander resources that could be better used to provide safe working conditions, serve customers or otherwise improve operations.

Toto said workers want to put contract talks behind them and "live our lives." And he predicted that the PRO Act would hold employers' feet to the fire and finally force them to approach contract talks with the urgency the task requires.

"It puts accountability back at the bargaining table," Toto said. "The job is to go in there and get it done in a timely fashion."

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