



STEELWORKERS ON THE MOVE

Two recent developments with the United Steelworkers are important for manufacturers and producers throughout the United States. On April 18, 2007, the USW announced that it was merging with two soon-to-merge British unions, the Transportation & General Workers Union (800,000 members) and Amicus (990,000 members). The purpose of the merger is for the Steelworkers to follow internationally where U.S. manufacturers and producers are expanding their businesses. According to USW President Leo Gerard, "The time for global unionism has arrived. As corporations globalize, we need to build a counterforce."

Labor unions in many other countries enjoy a stronger standing in membership and legal status than the United States. Part of the USW strategy is to energize employees in those jurisdictions to put pressure on U.S. companies, with an objective to soften those companies' resolve to oppose organizing in the United States. For example, the Steelworkers recently announced a new international website to organize ExxonMobil workers throughout the world, called workersatexxonmobil.usw.org. Any U.S. company producing identifiable products internationally, whether cars, clothing or oil, needs to develop an international strategy to anticipate potential USW pressure points, which extend beyond the workforce to reach customers, vendors and governments.

In another initiative, the USW on April 26, 2007 announced it was joining forces with Alcoa, Goodyear, U.S. Steel and other manufacturers to protect and increase manufacturing jobs in the United States. The group, known as the Alliance for American Manufacturing, will first address what they believe is the Chinese government's manipulation of currency and subsidies to Chinese industries. In addition to trade issues, the group also plans to focus on health costs and how that has hurt American competitiveness. According to Leo Gerard, "The fundamental reason we've formed this is we've lost 3 million manufacturing jobs, and there doesn't appear to be a strong pro-American manufacturing voice out there...the National Association of Manufacturers promotes the loss of manufacturing. The NAM has become the voice of

multi-nationalists giving away our jobs, of setting up operations overseas.” NAM responded by saying that “We take a back seat to no one on fighting the battle on Chinese currency. We started it, we led it and we put it on the administration’s radar screen.”

What does this Alliance mean for non-union manufacturers in the United States? Quite simply, the USW will use this in organizing to show the workforce how it works constructively with leading manufacturers throughout the United States to address job security and healthcare. It is a cunning attempt on the part of the USW (whose membership has dropped by over 800,000 during the past fifteen years, even after mergers with several other unions) to make it appear as though the USW has some credibility in the fight to keep U.S. manufacturing jobs.

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