



## Unity Gives Us Power

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Class struggle is a never-ending process, something that becomes ever clearer when society sees an increase in economic disputes stemming from competition, along with unchecked ambition and greed. Workers today are under a worse attack than ever before, and this is not the time to ignore it, or for them to act as if things are business as usual. They have been on the back foot for a long time, but the current situation calls for workers to think again and evaluate what they deserve from life, and how they see their future.

So it was that during the 28th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations), the most powerful union in the United States with more than 13 million affiliate members, held this week in St. Louis, Missouri, it was reasserted that every worker has the right to fair participation and a secure position, with decent employment and raised wages and benefits. Indeed, every person in work deserves the freedom to join a union and negotiate the proper compensation for their services. This principle is the very beating heart of the workers' movement.

On this occasion the slogan chosen for the convention was Join, Fight and Win Together, for there is nothing better, as expressed by the great organisation's president Richard Trumka, because this is the best chance we have to roll up our sleeves and work together and united, with the strength of steel. A new vision of prosperity is urgent and necessary if no one is to be left out of these major goals, for this is the best way to defend ourselves against the threats and intimidation that the working classes are faced with on a daily basis.

Attended by the most important trade union leaders in North America, some congressmen and senators, as well as a number of distinguished international leaders invited to take part and share our impressions and experiences of the current situation, it was apparent during the meetings that a new system of politics and government was getting in the way of progress for the labour sector, provoking confusion and fear for people. This is one of the key themes, as highlighted during the convention, which is currently at the forefront of debate in the United States and in many other countries across the globe.



The question is whether to be united or divided, because it should be clear that in this sector, just as in any other, unity gives strength, and strength lends us the power to stand up to enemies and for political, economic and social aims and ideals to win out. Trumka asserted that trade unionism is as patriotic as the US flag or the Statue of Liberty, and reminded us that a government forfeits its right to call itself democratic when it represses workers' rights.

This is the best time to strengthen dialogue and maintain communication between all workers' unions, and thereby ensure the power of collective bargaining and the freedom of association. Decisions are often made between people that are right or wrong, but we must all give ourselves the time to put things right, because being stronger is a choice. I found it moving to hear the fire-fighters union's slogan, in the wake of wild fires destroying hundreds of thousands of hectares in the US, which is: 'When things get tough, we get stronger'.

Many of the issues discussed were brought to light in an internal discussion session about ways of building greater power and solidarity right from the workplace up and throughout the chains of global production. Another question posited was whether free trade agreements have had their day, since they increasingly represent a process of inequality and loss of sovereignty, or indeed whether there could be other strategies for creating a fairer form of cross-border globalisation.

There was a lot of interest in the attendance of some high-profile leaders, including Leo Gerard, international president of the USW; James Hoffa, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters; Guy Ryder, director general of the World Trade Organisation; Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC); Bob Martínez, president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM); Dennis Williams, international president of United Automobile Workers (UAW); Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, and many others. Over four days we union leaders worked intensively on new strategies for the unified struggle to achieve greater justice, fairness, dignity and respect.

The convention drew to a close with the well-deserved recognition and re-election of Richard Trumka for another four year period at the head of the AFL-CIO, a celebratory dinner and the awards ceremony for the prestigious 2017 International George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award. The award, which I had the honour of receiving during the 2011 convention, was received by Han Sang-gyun, president of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.