

# Pulp truth

Volume 1 • Issue 2



*Please copy Pulp Truth front and back and distribute it during non-work time using your Communications and Action Teams, steward system, Unite Chapel Reps and members or Rapid Response network. Be sure to leave copies in lunchrooms, break rooms, Chapel notice boards, etc. We want to hear what's happening in your workplace. Send your news to [lbaker@usw.org](mailto:lbaker@usw.org)*

## Workers Uniting—Strengthening Our Global Union

**By Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary**

In July 2008 the United Steelworkers and Unite formed the first global trade union—Workers Uniting. For some of us it was a long time coming! For many years trade unionists recognised there was a need to stand together in the face of global capital.

The unions that formed Workers Uniting negotiate with many of the same employers—particularly in paper and packaging, oil, education, metals and manufacturing. We also have to deal with the same economic model in the USA, Canada, UK and Ireland.

We have made great strides since 2008. In companies such as MeadWestvaco, Georgia-Pacific (GP), Kimberly-Clark and International Paper (IP) our union reps are coordinating activities. Senior union officers from both unions discuss the issues that face members. There is greater coordination of our political

work on issues such as healthcare and the response to the economic crisis.

The first steps have been taken for our full-time officers to work together, and I am proud that the first leadership course for lay union reps from both our unions took place in the UK recently.

Employers are now sitting up and taking notice and other unions want to know more about our progress—Workers Uniting's influence is growing. In Unite we were proud to support USW (and Workers Uniting members) at Vale Inco in Canada, and we are proud that Unite reps will be attending the USW Paper & Pulp conference to strengthen our global union and build solidarity.

You can learn more about Workers Uniting at [www.workeruniting.org](http://www.workeruniting.org).

## Unite to Participate in USW Paper Sector Conference

Unite representatives will play an active role in the USW Paper Sector conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Aug. 17-19.

They will be doing a presentation on the state of the UK print, packaging and paper industry and political situation in the UK and talk about the European Social Dialogue with the CEPI, a trade association for the European paper-related

industries.

They also will be participating in the USW council meetings.

Before the conference, representatives, staff and rank-and-file members from each union will meet as Workers Uniting—our global union—for a day-long meeting to plan future joint actions together.

## Unite GPM Sector Ranges From Papermaking to Electronic Communications

**By Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary**

Unite has 23 different sectors covering almost every sector of the UK and Irish economies. The Graphical, Paper & Media (GPM) sector has 60,000 members in commercial printing, papermaking, packaging, publishing, newspapers, advertising, media and electronic communications. We organise and represent production and white-collar workers.

In the UK and Ireland the print, papermaking, packaging and media industries are covered by nationally agreed pay and conditions or by localised group-wide agreements. The Unite GPM Sector holds many such agreements with employers. A number of larger companies are European Union based and therefore are required to have European Works Councils.

The sector is serviced by local lay reps who are based in chapels (ie: locals or workplace branches). Union reps are called

Fathers of the Chapel (FOC) and Mothers of the Chapel (MOC). They in turn are supported by a network of full-time regional officers and senior head office officials along with specialist staff.

In common with most manufacturing industries there have been job losses and closures in the sector. Many Unite members work for small and medium-sized companies and over the past two years, because of the economic downturn, employers' organisations covering the commercial print industry in the UK and in Scotland have failed to make a pay offer. This has resulted in local pay bargaining.

Our current database of chapels who have notified Unite of settlements shows that, on average, pay deals for 2010 are around 2% to 2.5%. In paper and corrugated packaging national agreements have yet to be concluded at the time of this writing.

# Workers Uniting Leadership Exchange Program Begins

The Workers Uniting leadership exchange program helps our global union to build power internationally. The leadership course covers important themes around globalization and industrial relations in multinational organizations.

Ten Unite representatives and 11 USW members were selected to participate in the program. The Unite officers spent a week in May observing and participating in negotiations throughout the U.S. The USW members spent a week in July at Esher Place, Unite's education center. Next year they all will complete the second week of the training.

## USW and Unite Officer Exchanges

**Unite Regional Officer** Alison Jones spent her time in Southern California. In her discussions with USW representatives, common problems were shared.

"It was obvious that workers' concerns are global concerns and that we need face-to-face exchanges between Unite and the USW to enable us to effectively share information and ideas," Jones wrote.

One of the ideas she will take back with her is the "Weingarten Rights" card given to USW members that tells them they have the right to have union representation if a manager asks them to attend a meeting alone.

She participated in a meeting between IP management at Anaheim Container Plant and the Local 810 committee.

"The meeting was extremely typical of similar discussions that take place within Unite workplaces in the UK, however, important statutory and legal differences were prevalent, including differences in layoff clauses, disability status and rates of pay," Jones wrote.

She also joined a Local 810 committee meeting held in preparation for a meeting with management the next day. The agenda included a discussion on the company's attendance policy and outstanding grievances.

"As we discussed strategies to deal with these issues, it was evident that representatives from Unite and USW need to develop close working relationships and extend discussions to cross borders. Developments and decisions taken by multinational companies are happening at an international level. Therefore, we should also ensure we have a forum to share information and ideas," Jones wrote.

## More Hours Worked

**Regional Officer** Tim Elliot visited Wisconsin and participated in a negotiation session between Kimberly-Clark management at the Marinette site and local union leaders. The mill makes paper towels and cartons and employs just over 250 people.

"Most of the work force works 2,496 hours a year, unlike the people in factories in the UK who work 740 hours less," he wrote.

The next day he participated in a union-management meeting at a NewPage mill.

"What was interesting was that our members at the above mill worked six days (48 hours a week) with the next day off throughout the year on a three shift basis. This meant that the people were earning high basics but with very little time off," Elliot wrote.

## Similarities, Differences

**Regional Officer** Louisa Bull spent her time in British

Columbia (BC) going to meetings and sharing experiences with local union officers, members and staff representatives. She learned about Canadian employment law from one of the union lawyers during breaks in a meeting between the BC Labour Board, Local 2009 and one of the more hostile saw mills in the province. The issue was union recognition of the mill.

"Whilst the origins of the legislation can be traced back to the UK, much has been changed and improved over time," she wrote. "We may have statutory recognition in the UK, but here in BC this is strengthened by the right to seek arbitration to gain a collective agreement and the positive right to strike if all else fails."

Bull got the opportunity to meet Napoleon Gomez, general secretary of the Mexican mineworkers union Los Mineros.

"Meeting Napoleon was a unique privilege and has left me with a renewed commitment to our work as trade unionists," she wrote.

## A Shrinking World

Twenty Unite lay activists joined USW lay representatives at Unite's training centre at Esher Place, near London, for the first Workers Uniting leadership course, where they heard presentations on topics like economics and UK labor history, laws and politics; discussed issues like outsourcing and globalization; participated in case studies; and learned how to be effective leaders.

After learning about the government structure in the UK, the USW representatives visited the British Parliament and saw members in the House of Commons in action. They also talked with some Labour Party members.

"The most important part of the week was building relationships and establishing a network to help each other grow," said USW activist Shig Noguchi.

"The exchange was amazing not only for me but everyone in the class. It made the big world a small place. It is encouraging to know struggles and accomplishments are the same for all workers regardless of where they live," he added.

USW activist Denny Lauer expressed similar sentiments.

"The exchange was beneficial in that it shrinks the world," he said. "Meeting new activists from the UK was refreshing in that we all have the same goals. It was helpful to know that we share similar challenges when it comes to outsourcing, safety for our members, lean manufacturing and issues with the government in trying to erode the union's strength."

"Creating one-to-one relationships is invaluable," Lauer added.

Both see Workers Uniting as helping paper workers.

"By creating links across the 'pond,' we will be able to build solidarity more quickly on actions against multinational paper companies," Lauer said. "'An injury to one is an injury to all' now takes on a global flavor."

"The potential is endless in collective action, coordinated bargaining/master agreements, having a united front and common agenda, exchanging information, raising standards in health, safety, and the environment, political and/or social campaigning on industry issues and organizing," Noguchi said.

"A victory with a multinational could have a rollover effect on domestic companies and could increase wages, benefits and pull up the sector as a whole," he added.

