

WE CAN WIN THE WORLD WE WANT

Workers Uniting agree action plan to end austerity



We often hear about the 'global recession', but how often does anyone ever say they want to challenge it, that they've got ideas, that there's something we can do?

Workers' Uniting – a global coalition of Unite and the United Steelworkers (USW) – met earlier this year to discuss exactly how we can practically change the misery of millions of union members and their families worldwide.

The USW is Unite's sister union and represents similar members to Unite throughout the USA, Canada and Mexico. Unite and USW make up Workers' Uniting. And in May, 150 activists and experts met together to develop a Workers Uniting international plan for shared prosperity, to replace the feed-the-rich-starve-the-poor austerity that has been shoved down workers' throats for half a decade.

Workers, union leaders, economists, and other experts from a half dozen countries and two continents gathered in Toronto to produce a comprehensive plan called *Path to shared prosperity*. Workers Uniting is now implementing the plan, together with the help of like-minded groups.

The idea of the conference stemmed from the idea that austerity is the only solution to the global crisis caused by reckless gambling on Wall Street and the City. Experts showed how austerity benefits the already rich and devastates everyday workers.

The prosperity plan contains specific policy initiatives in four areas – manufacturing and industrial policy; workplace rights; building a green economy; investment in public services.

"We have been told for a long time there was only one solution, austerity, and there was no alternative," said **Ken Neumann**, USW Canadian national director. "It's our task to say there is an alternative to attacking our communities. It is investing in our communities."

Unite general secretary **Len McCluskey**, agreed. He said, "The scale of the cuts of the Cameron government are far deeper and more painful than anything we have ever seen before, with a massive cut in public spending planned during the lifetime of this parliament.

"The picture in Ireland is perhaps even worse. The days of the Celtic Tiger are long gone and in its place lurks the Grim Reaper, meeting out cuts, pain and despair in the form of the austerity programme.

"All this demanded and imposed by the IMF, the European Commission and the European Central Bank. Right across the Euro zone the austerity agenda is causing mayhem."

Talking specifically of the plan, Len said it would not substitute for national strategies to combat austerity, but would complement them. "It will demonstrate

that we are working together as part of a united movement.

"The effect of austerity has been to funnel money to the richest and beggar the world's workers, he said. That did not work in the Gilded Age, and it's not working now."

Strategy

The conference prepared a preliminary strategy report for prosperity, focusing on the failure of free markets and a lack of government regulations. Quite simply, it just doesn't work.

Instead, the conference agreed, "we must rebuild the economy from the bottom up and ensure that as the economy grows, all must share in the outcome."

Economic outcomes are the direct result of political choices – a point the strategy made clear.

The preliminary report lists comprehensive and wide ranging policy proposals to support each of the initiative areas – from reforming bankruptcy law to giving priority to deferred wages, benefits and pensions to mitigating the effects of global climate change.

USW's international president **Leo Gerard** said, "To accomplish such a plan will require concerted effort of labour unions and many other groups. When we are together, we can win."



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Leo Gerard
USW international president

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Len McCluskey
Unite general secretary



Speakers at the conference were very optimistic. Among them was **Peggy Nash**, a member of parliament in Canada, who said, “None of us would be part of the labour movement if we didn’t feel we could change the world.”

Economist **Lawrence Mishel**, president of the American Economic Policy Institute, agreed, saying, “Providing hopefulness and building a movement of institutions and people representing the bottom 99 percent is our task. We have more people than they have. We can take back our institutions.”

Leo Gerard agreed. “We can win the world we imagine, where no one goes hungry or homeless, where good manufacturing jobs fueled by clean energy are plentiful, where we invest in people, where families have

hope and unions are strong.”

And Len McCluskey said, “I believe that we are capable of making this happen. We know that all people want decent and secure jobs, decent pay, health care for their families, and pension that give them dignity in retirement.

“We know the mechanisms that we need in place to make this happen. We need our unions to be able to organise and bargain collectively unhindered and free from attacks. We need the state to lead investment and drive the economy forward. And we know that the global financial markets need to be regulated and brought under control.

“The time has come for Workers Uniting to set out our shared objectives; to design

our strategy to gain influence across our four countries; to take our message of hope back to our membership; and show them the importance of real transnational political action.

“I think we stand on the edge of something immensely important. I hope that in the future our organisations will look back at this moment and see that it was here, in this very hall, that a new international fight-back started to take shape.

“I look forward to working together to make change happen and to build a better world.”

• For more on Workers Uniting visit www.unitetheunion.org and click on International