

FSW Function Report

Name and Title: Judy Gradford, Elected Alternate Delegate and Team Captain

Name and nature of event/function (i.e. District 1 Conference, Steward Training at ILR, etc.):

CWA 74 th Convention, IUE/CWA Convention,

Dates attended:

April 19 through 23, 2013.

What was the purpose/goal of the function?

I attended the bi-annual CWA International convention as a delegate for our local. I also attended the IUE portion of the convention and the opening meeting of the Minority Caucus as well. These gatherings select leaders and representatives' to various committees, set policy and direction for the national and its various divisions and settle grievances filed by members who are aggrieved of decisions made in their locals. They also prioritize a focus for the National over the next two years.

What did you learn and/or what significant information was shared at the function?

Both the IUE gathering and the CWA Convention speakers addressed the extremely difficult conditions for organizing new members and for winning fair contracts. They addressed the unprecedented attacks on labor and the National Labor Relations Board. There was a call for unity and reaching out beyond the boundaries of organized labor to build a movement to bring economic justice back to America. Movement building was a very large focus of the Convention. Our CWA President Larry Cohen gave a very inspiring presentation on the need for a million person movement to bring economic democracy to our nation.

We learned about the great work that is being done with labor and the environmental movement coming together. We also learned about how German trade unionists are supporting the workers at T-Mobile for fair and decent working conditions by putting pressure on the German parent company. A fearless group of workers presented at this conference, taking on issues such as racial equity, gender equity, gay rights, gun violence, immigration reform and border security. The issue of the mega trade agreement known as the Trans Pacific Trade Agreement was also discussed as a major threat to our jobs, health and even national sovereignty,

Another very significant event at the Convention was the creation of a special Strategic Industry fund to create a resource to fund Movement Building. This fund was created from the interest on a multi-million dollar strike fund. Our own President Evelyn Evens is going to be an alternate representative on this fund.

At the CWA Convention there was significant debate about how to create bargaining power and solidarity across the telecom industry with so many companies and large geographic regions. There seemed to be an almost geographical divide between the east and west coasts about how to create successful industry wide bargaining. West coasters wanted to create a more global way of bargaining that would create a new division with a leader who was empowered to approve contracts. East coasters were fearful that local concerns and autonomy would be lost if a new Telecom Sector was created with a single director having the power to agree to contracts. Others were concerned about the cost and creating another level of bureaucracy. In this vote the east coasters prevailed.

As a body, The Convention approved many resolutions that will guide our work for the next two years. I was proud of the level of discussion and debate that took place on the floor of the convention. It was humbling to see such a strong democratic process at work and to see the level of care and concern that my union brothers and sisters had for each other, the ideals of our country and the well being of humans around the planet.

How is what you learned relevant to FSW?

For the last year I have been on hiatus from my normal union activism. I had been very frustrated about the lack of any serious organizing to win a decent contract. Attending this Convention and an IUE Workshop in particular on “Increasing Member Involvement” made me realize that I needed to come back and fight for the kind of kick ass union that we used to be. It struck me that we must begin our mobilization effort with mobilizing our own leadership. In order for our members to follow, we leaders must lead. This means that all of us in leadership must make a personal commitment to developing and carrying out a plan of action on how we are going to win a fair contract. That must be our number one union priority.

At The IUE workshop David Nack spoke about two models of locals. He described a vending machine union verses a solidarity machine union. These two models create very different outcomes. The vending machine model relies on legal solution to any and all problems, Workers learn about their rights but not how to come together to stand up for their rights. The solidarity machine model uses collective action to solve

problems in the work place and to win good contracts. The solidarity model brings members together to come up with creative and effective solutions. Workers strategize, organize and gain power by coming together and taking action. Our union needs to develop a solidarity machine if we are to survive in our current environment.

The message of Movement Building is also very relevant to our struggle for a fair contract. Not only do we need to build our internal solidarity machine but we must also create outside pressure on the County and this requires Movement Building in our community. We need to bring our allies in to County Legislature, to write Op Ed pieces and to join us in creating a demand in the community that the County treat it's workers fairly.

The creation of the Strategic Industries Fund may be a major impetus for our local to develop an organizing plan that would be applicable to this fund. Having our own FSW president serve on that board will certainly position our local to have much better understanding of how that fund works and what activities qualify as fundable.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Gradford