

THE COMMUNICATOR



Volume 4 Number 1 | Printing Packaging & Production Workers Union of North America | Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 2026

PPPWU Hails Member of Union Family Elected Mayor



HBCU BUZZ VIA GOOGLE IMAGES

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Craft-Editorial Partnership at Newsday Strong After 50 Years



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Ralph Meers, 'Man of Great Decency,' Dies In Georgia at 85



PHOTO BY PATRICIA MITCHELL/LOCAL 527-M

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Israel Castro to Lead Union with Faith in Future

By Fred Bruning
The Communicator

In a major leadership realignment, PPPWU secretary-treasurer Israel Castro, a 47-year-old labor professional with wide experience at the local, district council and international levels, has, in accordance with the union's constitution, replaced Steve Nobles, who retired as president in December after two years as top officer.

Castro, who served previously as PPPWU organizing director as well as District 3 principal officer, takes control at a time of change and caution as the union weighs affiliation with a larger labor organization while continuing to resist Teamster raids on PPPWU locals and attempts to lure members into the IBT.

"There is no one in our organization better equipped to take on this responsibility," said Nobles. "Israel is committed, fearless and innovative. We're fortunate to have a person of Israel's caliber to take the PPPWU into the future."

Other union leaders hailed Castro's move into the presidency and said his talent long had been evident.

"Anyone who has had the pleasure of working with Israel through the years knew that he would be the leader of this great union at some point

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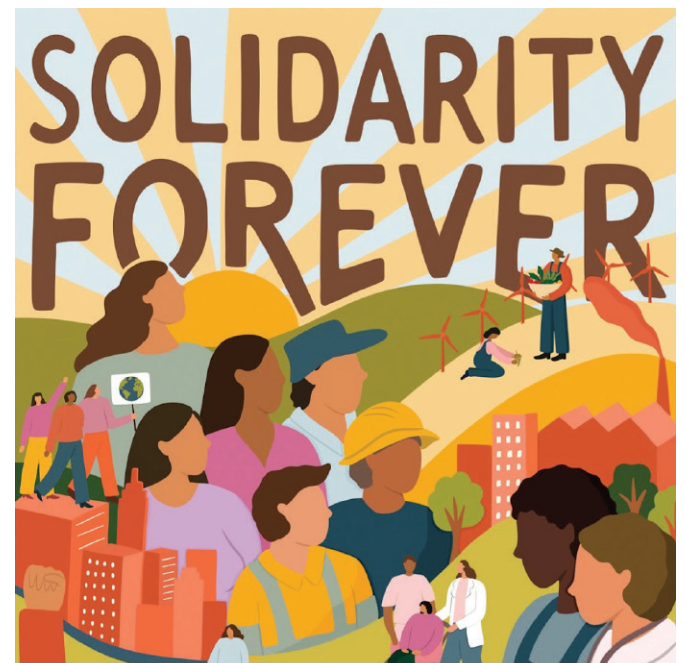
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With Confidence and Commitment, We'll Go Forward Together

IN DECEMBER, THE GENERAL BOARD CONFIRMED ME AS PPPWU president according to provisions of the union constitution – an enormous honor that comes with a sense of excitement and great responsibility.

Moving from secretary-treasurer to the top job, I succeed one of the union's most respected and productive leaders, Steve Nobles, whose



friendship and guidance I cherish. Steve's wise stewardship over the last two years helped steer the PPPWU through a dynamic period of change, renewal and progress. For his remarkable contributions, we should all be grateful.

I would also like to thank past union leaders for nurturing a rank-and-file member like me and allowing him to rise from the pressroom floor to the highest position of a labor organization with an admirable, century-old history of service and accomplishment.

In that regard, I want to express particular appreciation to President Emeritus George Tedeschi, past president Kurt Freeman and, once again, Steve Nobles. Each has been a source of strength and encouragement. I am humbled by the confidence they have shown in me.

I also want to mention Brother Clark Ritchey, PPPWU secretary-treasurer, who died unexpectedly in June.

Had Clark lived, I would have enthusiastically supported him for the PPPWU presidency. On the national and local levels, Clark showed what an effective union leader should be – smart, devoted and always with members foremost in mind.

In Clark's honor – and with respect to all the union leaders who preceded me – I am eager to move our great organization forward.

How will that be achieved?

First, let's deal with the obvious.

The Teamsters, put off-balance by our legal victories and unshakable determination, continue attempts to raid the PPPWU. With little regard for traditional union ethics and principles of fair play, the IBT is trying to undermine us local by local and member by member.

It hasn't worked – and won't.

Our leaders and rank-and-file members are not being swayed by baseless IBT claims. We are not giving ground. Our union is proud, strong and united. We are here to stay.

But to keep the PPPWU on the right path, we must grow, and that means organize, organize, organize.

As a local union leader and principal officer of District Council 3, I emphasized the need for inventive ways to reach potential union members. We still need to get out and meet people to tell our story, of course, but also must tap the power of social media and modern communication.

Organizing is at the top of my list of priorities.

But that won't be enough.

Because of technological change in every sector covered by our union – printing, packaging and production – we have lost members. It's the same story throughout much of organized labor as unions and workers learn to contend with the digital age.

We have to adjust – and that includes affiliating with a larger labor group.

Talks on that subject are underway at the general board level. If we proceed, a convention would be called to consider a merger. If approved by delegates, the proposal would go to all members for ratification.

Whatever the next step, my pledge to you is that we will remain independent and autonomous and that I will work every day to assure our future and serve our members – lessons I learned from the outstanding leaders who have made the PPPWU a great and enduring labor organization. ■

OUTLOOK

HAROLD MEYERSON

California Dreamin': Make Billionaires Pay

ONE OF CALIFORNIA'S MOST POWERFUL UNIONS AND TWO of the nation's most prominent economists unveiled a 2026 state ballot measure that would establish the nation's first wealth tax. In the course of their presentation, they offered a master class in how to structure such a tax in ways that disarm its opponents.

The union behind the proposal is SEIU's United Healthcare Workers West, whose members work in hospitals and clinics across the state. The economists are UC Berkeley's Emmanuel Saez and his now retired Berkeley colleague Robert Reich, former secretary of labor and frequent contributor to *The Communicator*.

The ballot measure they unveiled is an emergency billionaires' tax aimed at making up the \$100 billion hit to California's Medicaid program over the next five years that the Republican Congress and President Trump delivered by enacting their One Big Beautiful Bill that disproportionately cut taxes on the wealthy and reduced federal allotments for Medicaid.

If it qualifies for the November 2026 ballot and is enacted by state voters, the initiative would levy a 5 percent tax on the wealth of the state's roughly 200 billionaires and direct 90 percent of those funds to California's Medicaid recipients and the institutions that serve them, with the remaining 10 percent going to the state's K-12 schools.

The stated purpose of this measure is to address what will surely be a crisis for many Medicaid recipients and the hospitals and clinics that treat them, where many of SEIU UHW's members work.

But its implications, at a time when the fortunes of the very wealthy



THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

are reaching stratospheric levels, may have even greater significance and proposals to hike taxes on the very rich are beginning to bubble up.

The spillover effects of its presence on the midterm-election ballot should be considerable. Democratic candidates, I suspect, will endorse it enthusiastically; conservative billionaires seeking public office may find themselves compelled to support it. Democrats in states and cities that are also home to the very rich may well

opt to enact similar proposals, whether through legislation or at the ballot box.

As Saez noted, the California initiative doesn't address the rapid growth of economic inequality as such.

It certainly does nothing to restore the highest-bracket income tax rate of 91 percent reached during the presidency of Republican Dwight Eisenhower. Nonetheless, it opens the door to further efforts to rein in the current redistribution of income and wealth to the very, sometimes obscenely, rich – efforts that are essential to preserving democracy. ■

Harold Meyerson is editor at large at The American Prospect magazine. This piece first appeared on the American Prospect website, prospect.org, and is reprinted with permission of the author.



THE COMMUNICATOR

Printing Packaging & Production
Workers Union of North America

Volume 4 Number 1
Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 2026
(USPS 410-750)

12301 Old Columbia Pike, Suite 310,
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904
240-223-0310

e-mail: info@pppwu.org

GEORGE TEDESCHI
Editor

FRED BRUNING
Managing Editor

AFFILIATIONS
Canadian Labour Congress
Member of International
Labor Communications Association
of Labour Media



THE COMMUNICATOR
(ISSN 2993-2696)
is published quarterly in
January-February-March,
April-May-June,
July-August-September,
October-November-December
for a total of four issues a year
for \$12 per year in the United
States and Canada and \$15 for
all other countries by the Printing
Packaging & Production Workers
Union of North America,
12301 Old Columbia Pike, Suite 310,
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904.
Periodical postage paid at
Washington, D.C. and
additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
THE COMMUNICATOR,
12301 Old Columbia Pike, Suite 310,
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904.

Publications Mail Agreement No.
41461512.
CANADA POST:
Return undeliverables to
P.O. Box 2601, 6915 Dixie Rd,
Mississauga, ON L4T 0A9.

Maybe Union Leaders Should be Running the Country

SOME YEAR – FOR THE NATION AND THE PPPWU. Donald Trump took office last January and upset the world economic order with tariffs that – so far – have done nothing more than hike consumer prices and rattle employers who don't know what to expect next.



Our two experts on economics and organized labor – George Kraw and Jerry Morgan – assess the damage and consider where things might go from here. (Pages 4, 7.)

Trump promised a golden age of prosperity when he was campaigning but often seems disconnected from the daily struggles of Americans. His passions, said Kraw, “have turned to remodeling the White House and winning praise for his foreign policy initiatives in a relentless – and likely futile – effort

to win the Nobel Peace Prize.”

There's plenty more to worry about – increased influence of artificial intelligence on the workplace, spiking energy prices, the possibility of recession, continued partisan rancor – and Americans can't be blamed for sometimes wondering who's in charge?.

At the PPPWU, that is never a question.

The union – and its predecessors – have had a succession of strong, steady professionals running the operation.

Now another top-notch person is taking over.

With the retirement of Steve Nobles in December after two demanding and productive years, Secretary-Treasurer Israel Castro moved into the top PPPWU job as the union's constitution requires. (Top Story, Pages 1, 8-9.)

Castro, 47, represents a new generation of labor leaders. He intends to keep the best practices of the past – grass roots organizing, for instance – while using 21st Century communication tools to expand the union's reach and increase membership.

Formerly the principal officer of District Council 3, Castro, who was sworn in earlier this month, has made priorities clear: Fight continued Teamster efforts to undermine the PPPWU, build the rank-and-file and bring more young people into leadership positions.



LINKEDIN VIA GOOGLE IMAGES

“I want to continue growing the union and to give other people the same opportunity that was given me to advance their careers and livelihoods,” he told reporter Dawn Hobbs. “I am also very committed to preparing the next generation of leadership.” (Page 9.)

Around the country, experts say, young people are showing increased civic spirit.

In the city of Stockbridge, Georgia, outside Atlanta, Jayden Williams, 22, the great-nephew of Eddie Williams, president of Local 527-M, became the youngest African-American mayor in the state when he defeated two-time incumbent Anthony Ford, a retired Army colonel, in November. (Page 4.)

The new mayor credits his great-uncle for emphasizing the importance of community service and Eddie Williams

says he always knew Jayden would be a success. “I'm just so impressed with him and other young people who are coming forward,” Williams said. “They bring a lot to the table.”

That idea – doing important, innovative work – was evident last September in Atlanta at the first Solidarity Conference event. With time to evaluate the combined meeting of the Newspaper, Specialty, Eastern and Midwestern conferences, officers and delegates said the meeting had been educational and inspiring.

“It felt good to be surrounded by like-minded people determined to protect workers' rights and assure a decent, middle-class life for thousands of union members,” said Deborah Morris, Local 406-C, Long Island, in a first-person piece on Page 10. Morris, a Newsday reporter who was elected Specialty Conference recording secretary, called the Atlanta experience “memorable.”

Union work produces vivid, meaningful memories – of friendship, struggles and battles fought and won.

PPPWU President Emeritus George Tedeschi and Ed Hershey, a former Newsday reporter and union advocate, recall in two touching stories how they brought together Newsday's craft and editorial workers in a historic alliance at Local 406-C. (Page 5.)

It took the threat of strike, but editorial workers got their first contract in 1975.

After 50 years, the partnership between craft and editorial workers is still strong and productive, Tedeschi said. A daring union drive paid off.

“In spectacular fashion, we met the test.”

COMMENTARY JIM HIGHTOWER

Red, Blue or Purple, We're all Americans

A headline on a recent news article caught my eye, for it declared, “Americans Disagree on Everything.”

I said to myself: “I disagree with that!”

Indeed, the untold story of today's America is the good news that We the People fundamentally agree on more than what supposedly separates us.

It is true that our daily media feed does relentlessly push political negativity and discord, and it's true that hyper-partisan politicians grab attention by hammering their narrow views into swords of hatred.

But that's them, not the greater us.

Even hot-button issues which dominate the Internet and talk-shows are actually not all that divisive for the majority of us. For example, nearly 90 percent of Americans (including two-thirds of Republicans) oppose the right-wing attempt to whitewash our nation's history by restricting teachers, museums etc. from addressing such realities as slavery.

More significantly, consider the real needs of ordinary workaday families. Basics like living wages, protecting



Social Security, busting-up monopolies, cleaning up pollution, providing affordable housing, funding our parks and libraries, stopping price gouging.

Overwhelmingly, Americans in red, blue, and purple areas agree on what government ought to be doing – and disagrees with what it is doing.

But the plutocratic moneyed elites that now fund and perpetuate Americas corrupt and dysfunctional government profit by promoting hatreds to pit us



THEBIGNEWSLETTER.COM VIA GOOGLE IMAGES

against each other, praying that all of us don't focus on them.

Don't succumb to their self-serving lies but seek ways to unite in what we Americans do agree on – specifically our historic commitment to the democratic values of economic fairness, social justice, and equal treatment for all. Anything less is BS.

Populist author, public speaker, and radio commentator Jim Hightower chronicles the ongoing fight by America's ordinary people against rule by plutocratic elites. Subscription rates for Hightower Lowdown commentary available at <https://jimhightower.substack.com/>

‘History-Changing’ Mayor is Cheered by Family and Union

By Dawn Hobbs
Special to the Communicator

As voters across the country call for a new generation of leaders to help the nation safeguard its democratic principles and prosper in the 21st Century, PPPWU officials hailed a member of the extended union family recently elected the youngest African-American mayor in the State of Georgia.

Jayden Williams, the 22-year-old grand-nephew of Eddie Williams, president of Local 527-M, Atlanta, was sworn in Jan. 2 as mayor of Stockbridge, Georgia – a stunning achievement for such a young person, said PPPWU President Israel Castro.

“The PPPWU and its predecessor entities have had a long and proud history of being involved in our community,” said Castro. “I am proud that Brother Eddie Williams and his family have worked so hard to continue that legacy.”

Backed by the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council and the Henry County Board of Education, Jayden Williams unseated two-time incumbent Anthony Ford, a retired Army colonel, with 53 percent of the vote in the town of 36,000, located about a half-hour south of Atlanta.

“I believe this moment in history is anything but trivial,” the mayor-elect told The Communicator in December. “It reflects a generation of young people who are eager to get to work and build a community that represents not just us, but all people.”

Williams’ victory was reported widely and comes at a time when there is a nationwide effort to draft the next generation of elected leaders.



STOCKBRIDGE FACTS

- Founded May 15, 1821
 - Located in Henry County, Georgia
 - Largest city in Henry County, fourth fastest growing county in the nation
 - Surrounded by the counties of Butts, Clayton, Dekalb, Newton, Rockdale and Spalding
 - Population: 38,607
 - Approximately 12 square miles
 - Twenty minutes from downtown Atlanta and 18 miles from state capital
 - Fifteen miles from Hartsfield Airport
 - Values: Professionalism, Excellence, Adaptability, Communications, Ethics (PEACE)
- Source: City of Stockbridge



Eddie Williams, president of Local 527-M, left, was a guiding force in the life of Jayden Williams, mayor of Stockbridge, Georgia, right, who says his great-uncle showed him the importance of organized labor ‘a long time ago.’

“This wave of youth activism marks a pivotal point where we recognize the opportunities before us and rise to meet them,” said Jayden Williams, who, like his opponent, did not run on a party line. “History is showing us that real change is coming and it’s being led by a new generation ready to redefine our political landscape.”

Eddie Williams said the success of his great-nephew is impressive but not surprising.

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Prices Still Up? Someone Alert the President

By George M. Kraw

The first year of President Donald Trump’s second term has left Americans full of doubt and foreboding about their economic future.

After promising during the 2024 campaign to “make America affordable again,” he has become disengaged from the everyday pocketbook challenges most Americans face. At a December cabinet meeting, Trump called the issue of affordability a “fake narrative” and a “con job” created by Democrats.

A short walk down memory lane shows that the President has put many of his promises on hold and may help explain why his poll numbers on economic issues are crashing.



George M. Kraw

- **Ending Inflation/Bringing Down Prices:** A cornerstone of his 2024 campaign, Trump promised to “end inflation” on day one and rapidly drive down prices, including for groceries, eggs, and general goods. Instead, inflation has surged in his second term, reaching 3 percent and groceries don’t cost any less.
- **Lowering Energy and Gasoline Prices:** He pledged to slash energy and electricity prices by half and get gasoline below \$2 a gallon. As of late 2025, gas prices have fallen but are averaging about \$3 a gallon nationally. Electricity prices have spiked in many areas. That spike will continue due to the voracious power appetites of AI data centers.
- **Lowering Housing Costs:** Trump promised to cut the price of a new home in half. The current high interest rates and labor shortages, due in part to immigration crackdowns, have made this impossible. Mortgage rates are down slightly but housing costs are going up nationally faster than wages.
- **Temporary Cap on Credit Card Interest Rates:** He promised a temporary cap on credit card interest rates at 10 percent. Didn’t happen – and won’t. The proposal has no traction in Congress where members give banks and credit card companies bipartisan support.
- **Preserving Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid:** Despite promising not to touch these entitlement programs, Trump’s budget proposals have slashed billions from Medicaid and Social Security disability insurance.
- **Paying off the National Deficit/Debt:** Trump said he’d pay down the federal deficit, partly through tariff revenue. Instead, the federal deficit has ballooned. While generating some revenue, tariffs are projected to increase the national debt further by driving up inflation and interest rates.



Meanwhile, salary wage growth is sporadic and dependent on job categories. Reports from the Center for American Progress and Brookings indicate that for the typical worker, wages are not keeping up with the cost of living.

None of this appears to particularly interest the President, whose passions have turned to remodeling the White House and winning praise for his foreign policy initiatives in a relentless – and likely futile – effort to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Trump’s chief joy is in hosting a succession of domestic and international supplicants who arrive at White House bringing gifts designed to please and flatter. He takes pride in the success of his family enterprises, ranging beyond real estate to crypto and even a Trump brand “Fight, Fight, Fight” watch collection, that he pitches in commercials on Fox News, Newsmax and other media outlets friendly to the President.

At the same time, Trump and key figures in his administration, notably Vice President JD Vance, have asked Americans for patience regarding the economy and cost-of-living concerns.

A century ago, the songwriter and labor activist Joe Hill wrote a song mocking politicians who promise “pie in the sky in the great by and by” but don’t address the problems of the here and now. The words are as relevant in the Age of Trump as they were in the last century.

George M. Kraw is a benefits lawyer in Silicon Valley and was a labor representative to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Advisory Committee from 2002-2005.

Fifty Years Ago, a Historic Move Paid Off

By George Tedeschi

Fifty years ago, we made history at Local 406-C on Long Island.

After a successful 1973 union drive that brought editorial workers at Newsday into 406 and formed a powerful alliance between the paper's blue-collar and white-collar workers, the company refused to budge on a first contract.

At other unionized newspapers, reporters and editors were represented by the Newspaper Guild. At Newsday, editorial staff members now were members of a craft union, the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union (IPPAU).

The company was not happy with our new partnership – one that threatened to shut down the paper if there were a strike – and, in any case, believed we could not make it work.

Local 406 negotiators and newsroom leaders like Edward Hershey – Ed recalls our 1973 organizing campaign in a story on this page – had bargained in good faith over the months but Newsday executives were determined to challenge the union and demonstrate corporate strength.



George Tedeschi



With no better option, we called for a union-wide strike vote of all 406 members at Newsday.

To win, we would need not only the support of editorial workers but union members in the craft areas, as well.

It was a risky move that would test the credibility of our expanded local and reputation of the IPPAU, as well.

I was 406 president and knew Newsday was counting on blue-collar units not to support editorial workers.

It was my job to convince pressmen, truck drivers, platemakers, building maintenance workers, electricians, machinists and other 406 craft area members that it was in our best interest to stick together.

In spectacular fashion, we met the test.

The vote to strike passed 314-48 – a convincing show of solidarity.

Even the New York Times took notice with a story on Sept. 29, 1975 carrying a headline that said it all: "Editorial and Craft Employees At Newsday Authorize a Strike."

In the next round of negotiations, I told Newsday we meant business and, without a contract settlement, would walk out during the approaching holiday season when the paper always was packed with lucrative Thanksgiving and Christmas advertising.

Newsday got the message and within two weeks we had our first editorial contract.

Much has changed in the newspaper world over the past half-century.

But 406 remains a strong and united local. Editorial members continue benefiting from years of outstanding union contracts. Labor-management relations with Newsday are harmonious and productive – good for Newsday, its employees and the Long Island community.

Our victory 50 years ago was a win for all. ■

George Tedeschi is PPPWU president emeritus and former president of Local 406-C, Long Island, and international president of the GCIU and GCC/IBT. He retired from his GCC/IBT post in 2019.

Newsday's 'Odd Couple' Got the Job Done

By Edward Hershey

If you searched Newsday's Long Island plant back in 1973 you might not have found two people less alike.

Yet there we were, an odd couple about to launch one of the most significant organizing drives in the annals of the newspaper union movement. – a tough labor leader and a reporter who had opposed another union's prior effort to organize my fellow Newsday journalists.

I'd been stewing for days. Assigned to follow up on a high-profile drug trafficking series, I was ordered by a top editor to craft a story that, in my view, overstated the series' significance. I objected but he insisted. Was it worth risking my career to take a stand? What choice did I have? Suddenly union representation did not seem like such a bad idea.

I arranged to meet George Tedeschi, the president of Local 406, which represented other segments of Newsday's workforce, including pressmen, delivery drivers, building maintenance, and other departments. The more we talked, the better the idea of union membership sounded.

I was especially impressed with a structure that allowed each unit to negotiate its own contract but, if necessary, required all Newsday Local 406 members to approve a strike, thereby providing a system of checks and balances.

But would my colleagues be receptive to aligning with a craft union? And what about Tedeschi's members? On issue after issue back in the 1970s a rift between blue-collar workers and college-educated professionals was widening.

Tedeschi clearly was interested. He understood that, with 300 editorial workers aboard, the union would gain enormous bargaining power as technological change began to shake the newspaper industry.

He had advanced from flyboy to apprentice and then journeyman pressman with a union card that virtually assured him of work at any newspaper in the United States. But those days were numbered.

Automation, which had rendered Linotyping obsolete, was setting off a series of strikes in New York and other cities and eventually would reach the nation's pressrooms.

And that was just the start.

The electronic newsroom was no longer a futuristic dream. Newsday was testing a prototype that allowed editors to review stories on a computer screen, add headlines and transmit laid-out pages to the back shop with the push of a button.

Tedeschi and I agreed to arrange a meeting that would allow editorial workers to meet union leaders – but discreetly.

"We're negotiating all our contracts now," he explained, "and I don't want the company to feel threatened."

The night of the meeting it rained so hard I could barely see out of my windshield. I began rehearsing excuses for why so few of us had shown up. Not to worry. By the time George arrived it was standing room only. I was stunned by the turnout – 60 journalists responding to hushed conversations and an oblique bulletin board note.

Answering questions from men and women who asked them for a living, George was straightforward and on point. We would have to show enough interest to initiate an organizing campaign, he said, but this turnout on a stormy night was "a very good start."

We formed a committee and began meeting at a diner a mile from the office. Unions often preach democracy and our sessions put that notion into practice. Long into the night, we debated every point of the bulletin board recaps we posted for editorial workers.

Company managers contended that even if there were reasons to unionize, we had little in common with the blue-collar members of Local 406.



Newsday reporter Edward Hershey, left, and Local 406-C, Long Island, president George Tedeschi, second left, launched an unprecedented 1973 organizing drive that brought newsroom employees into the ranks of a craft union. Hershey, now an Oregon-based writer, and Tedeschi, PPPWU president emeritus, met with company officials after a 1975 strike threat forced Newsday to halt stalling tactics and sign the first editorial unit contract.

That smacked of snobbery and hypocrisy, and we hit back, reproducing pay stubs of pressmen and drivers earning more than most reporters and editors. "If we're so much better than they are," we asked, "why do they make more than we do? The difference is – they have a union."

After balloting in an NLRB-supervised election there were 149 votes for the union and 144 against with eight uncounted ballots cast by employees we contended should be deemed ineligible to vote because they were supervisors or had access to confidential files.

We had to convince a federal hearing officer to disallow at least four of them to win. The contested voters testified along with witnesses called by both sides over a period of weeks at the National Labor Relations Board office in Brooklyn.

Then we waited for a decision. And waited. Months passed without word. Just before Christmas 1974, my home phone rang. It was George.

"Are you sitting down?" he asked. "We heard from the board. We won seven of the eight challenges. They'll probably appeal but as it stands, we've won."

What I didn't know was that we were only halfway there.

Instead of appealing, the company recognized us and took a tough stance as bargaining commenced, adopting a strategy designed to make us prove what it doubted – that pressmen and drivers, reporters and editors would stand together.

On October 1, 1975, after 22 months, it was time to put up or shut up. We voted overwhelmingly to strike. Six days later, the editorial union had its first contract. ■

Edward Hershey is a Portland, Oregon-based writer and former reporter at Newsday where he was a founding member and first vice-president of the Local 406-C editorial unit.

What Truths do We Still Regard As ‘Self-Evident?’

America is celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence this year – a visionary document that launched a revolution, changed the course of history, and affirmed the value of every citizen, landowner or laborer.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” the Declaration preamble said.

Though thrilling and far-seeing, the statement failed its own noble call to equality by allowing slavery to continue – an original sin that abided until Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation nearly a century later – and the manifold injustices that followed surely will be debated anew as Americans consider their country’s birth story, progress and direction.

It is right that the nation examine itself on questions of race – and other vital concerns – during this momentous anniversary occasion. Without looking back, moving forward is impossible.

Not to be forgotten in this year of fresh assessment is the welfare of American workers and the labor unions dedicated to protecting them.

Little is more fundamental to the “pursuit of happiness” than job security, fair treatment and the right of workers to organize on their own behalf.

“All that harms labor is treason to America,” Lincoln once said.

In the tech-centric 21st Century who are labor’s allies? Who inflicts the “harm” Lincoln denounced? What, in fact, is the future of labor?

These are not easy questions.

Lincoln was a Republican – surely a different sort than the current occupant of the White House though Donald Trump often compares himself to Lincoln – and hardly the only pro-labor GOP president.

“Only a fool would try to deprive working men and working women of their right to join the union of their choice,” said Dwight David Eisenhower, who led the nation from 1953-1961.

The 26th U.S. president, Teddy Roosevelt, was no less forceful. “It is essential that there should be organization of labor,” Roosevelt said. “This is an era of organization. Capital organizes and therefore labor must organize.”

You don’t hear much along those lines from Republican leaders these days.

Under President Trump, the situation is laughably lopsided.

Trump ended bargaining rights for thousands of federal employees, cut plant safety standards, eliminated wage protections and even wants to end minimum wage regulations for home care and domestic workers.

And that’s just the short list.

During the painful government shutdown last autumn, Trump threw a lavish “Great Gatsby”-themed party at his Mar-a-Lago estate, as if to mock American workers struggling to get by.

How, as a nation, we got from Republicans like Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt and Eisenhower to Donald Trump will be something historians and labor experts ponder during this historic year.

For individual union members, the future is now.

That sense of excitement and urgency was evident when delegates from around the country met in Atlanta for the inaugural PPPWU Solidarity Conference and renewed their commitment to the union and its members.

A vibrant, can-do spirit prevailed at that September event – the same sort of gutsy resolve that has propelled America for two-and-a-half centuries.

Israel Castro, who became PPPWU president upon the retirement in December of Steve Nobles captures the mood of the union – and the nation – in his first “Straight Talk” column on Page 2 of this edition.

“Our union is proud, strong and united,” Castro said. “We are here to stay.”



Point of View

BY ROBERT B. REICH

McDonald’s Pay is from Hunger

By Robert B. Reich

The Big Mac has a big problem.

According to the CEO of McDonald’s, fast food chains saw a double-digit dip in visits from lower- and middle-income customers in the first quarter of 2025.

The reason?

He says we’re becoming a two-tiered economy, and lower- and middle-income customers can no longer afford fast food.

While the stock market is riding high and the Trump administration is slashing taxes for corporations and the rich, nothing is “trickling down” to everyday Americans.

Frankly, it’s a little galling to hear the CEO of McDonald’s complaining about income inequality, because corporations like McDonald’s are making the problem worse.

They pay their workers so little that many have to rely on food stamps and Medicaid to make ends meet — for which the rest of us pay in our taxes.

Meanwhile, their CEOs are paid roughly 1,000 times more than their typical employee.

Big corporations have a history of union busting, further reducing the power of their workers to negotiate a living wage.

Finally, they make the entire economy fragile. As wealth concentrates in the richest 10 percent, the rest of America can’t afford to buy enough to keep the economy running.

So what can we do about this? End the trickle-down hoax once and for all: Tax cuts for the wealthy make the rest of us worse off, not better.

Fight for unions. In the 1950s, when America



UC BERKELEY, VIA GOOGLE IMAGES



THELOGIC.COM VIA GOOGLE IMAGES

had the biggest middle-class the world had ever seen, a third of all private-sector workers were unionized. Now, it’s 6 percent.

Raise the minimum wage to \$20 an hour (and higher for big corporations with billions in profits that pay their CEOs more than \$20 million a year).

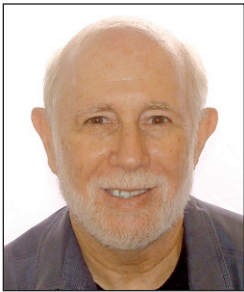
Bust up big monopolies with the power to keep prices high.

Demand corporations share their profits with workers, so that when corporations do better, their workers do, too.

In sum: Build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. Because if we don’t, we’re all cooked.

Robert B. Reich served as secretary of labor in the Clinton administration and is Emeritus Carmel P. Friesen Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley. He has written numerous books including the latest, “Coming Up Short: A Memoir of My America.” This piece appeared originally as a Substack newsletter (robertreich@substack.com).

‘Day One’ Was Long Ago



At the end of November Donald Trump took to social media to announce there is a new word: affordability.

Claiming he got foreign pharmaceutical companies to lower prices on drugs, he proclaimed, “I AM THE AFFORDABILITY PRESIDENT.”

Four days later, in a televised cabinet meeting he said, “Affordability is a Democrat con job.”

Of course, Trump understands little about real-world economics – and surely not what “affordability” means to ordinary people not born to millions.

He takes credit for things he didn’t do – and fails to mention what is most important.

Gasoline prices have dropped because of a glut of oil on the market, not because of Trump policies.

Cost of eggs dipped because there were fewer outbreaks of avian flu– flocks increased faster as did egg production.

But, overall, grocery prices are up with most other consumer costs and forget about them coming down.

What happened to Trump’s promise that he would lower costs on “Day One?”

Americans are still waiting. It was a fantasy, all along – worthless, like most of Trump’s promises.

At one point, Trump suggested the government might allow a two-year extension of covid-era subsidies for health insurance but pulled back when Republicans predictably objected. (If it’s going to help the neediest Americans, you can be sure GOP legislators will refuse.)

Then there was Trump’s plan to give every taxpayer a \$2,000 dividend to help with rising prices and inflation. The President said he’d finance the giveaway with tariff money.

Uh-oh. The Committee for a Responsible Federal

Government judged Trump’s program would cost \$600 billion – way exceeding the ability of tariffs alone to foot the bill.

Even Trump’s own treasury secretary, multi-millionaire Scott Bessent, said legislation would be needed to approve Trump’s money-for-everybody idea. Pretty soon Trump stopped talking about spreading the wealth.

And can we talk about tariffs for a moment?

One of the reasons millions of Americans are struggling with higher prices is Trump’s ill-advised levies.

Trump may think foreign governments are paying the price. Tell that to families trying to survive the monthly bills.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the legality of Trump’s tariffs, though Bessent said at a December economic conference there were other ways of keeping tariffs in place.

It’s clear Trump and his wealthy enablers have no idea how to help the consumer.

Meanwhile, the New York Times reported that even the pizza business is taking a beating. Consumers are buying less and supplies are costing more. A person in the story told of an extra-large pie with toppings that cost nearly \$30.

Trump thinks affordability is a Democratic con job? Someone else must pay when the White House sends out for pizza. ■

Jerry Morgan is a former Newsday business writer and member of Local 406-C.

Guest Spot

BY LAUREN MCFERRAN AND CELINE MCNICHOLAS

Attacking Independent Thought

Independent agencies were carefully designed by Congress to ensure that those charged with safeguarding critically important public interests–like workers’ rights, product safety, or household financial security–would act to serve the public good, not the president’s political needs.

However, since taking office, the Trump administration has been on a crusade to attack and undermine the effectiveness of independent agencies. Trump has taken several unprecedented and illegal steps to politicize these agencies, including:

Summarily firing dozens of independent agency leaders – who, by law, can only be removed from office for misconduct – based on political disagreements and then either stacking boards with Trump loyalists or letting seats sit vacant, depriving agencies of the ability to function.

Implementing new controls over the operations of agencies, including giving the White House control over which agency projects to fund or defund, and requiring every agency to employ a “White House liaison” officer.

For the first time, requiring independent agencies to submit draft regulations to the Office of Management and Budget for White House review prior to publication and coordinate with the White House to review all existing regulations, giving Trump the power to change or veto independent standards.

These actions will have a sweeping impact and will directly undermine the safety and well-being of workers, consumers, and the public.

While all government agencies need to have some ability to make decisions based on policy expertise rather than political considerations, Congress structured certain agencies to be more independent and benefit from a variety of perspectives.

These watchdog agencies make decisions that impact our country at all levels, from deciding which toys are safe for our kids to determining what interest rate levels will help the economy thrive. Nobody wants unqualified politicians weighing in to make these decisions based on which bank or toy company gave them the most political contributions.

Trump’s assault on independent thinking within the government deserves more attention and opposition from Congress, both to defend its prerogative to create public watchdogs within the executive branch and to protect the people these important agencies were designed to serve. ■

Lauren McFerran is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and for three years served as chairman of the National Labor Relations Board during the Biden administration. Celine McNicholas is director of policy/general counsel at the Economic Policy Institute. This piece appeared first on the EPI website, epi.org

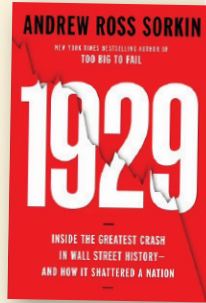
All the Best

Print

1929: Inside the Greatest Crash in Wall Street History — and How It Shattered a Nation

Andrew Ross Sorkin

Andrew Ross Sorkin, a financial columnist for the New York Times, author of the 2008 book, “Too Big to Fail,” and co-creator of the Showtime series, “Billions,” spent eight years researching the Wall Street market crash of Oct. 29, 1929 – “Black Tuesday” – that hastened the Great Depression. In the introduction to “1929,” Sorkin says his examination of the characters who plunged millions of Americans into poverty reveals where “responsibility lies” and what “lessons remain.” As 21st Century billionaires invest wildly in artificial intelligence, hawk cryptocurrency and gain influence in the White House, we can ponder Sorkin’s prudent message and wonder if the truths of 1929 are being overlooked – or maybe were never learned. **Viking, \$35.**



Music

Everything I Know About Love

Laufey

Laufey Lín Bing Jónsdóttir is a Chinese-Icelandic singer and songwriter with a voice that could melt polar ice caps. On stage, she is simply “Laufey” – pronounced “Lay-vay” – and has gained worldwide notice for melding jazz, pop, classical and even bossa nova traditions. Her familiar cabaret style pleases older audiences but Laufey also is credited with introducing a younger audience to jazz arrangements. “Everything I Know About Love,” is her debut album – two have followed – and testifies to the singer’s range and promise. Might be chilly in Iceland but this compilation shows why audiences worldwide have warmed to Laufey Lín Bing. **AWAL label, various retailers. Price varies.**



Video/Streaming

The American Revolution

Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein and David Schmidt, co-directors

Is there a better time to remind the nation of how our noble experiment began? As concerns about the future of American democracy deepen with every unprecedented move by the Trump administration, PBS – the Public Broadcasting Service defunded by Republicans – is presenting a six-part, 12-hour series by renowned documentary maker Ken Burns and his team titled simply, “The American Revolution.” Latest in Burns’ highly-regarded assessments of the American experience, this production examines the origins and impact of an independence movement that, the directors say, encouraged “people around the world to imagine new and better futures for themselves, their nations, and for humanity.” Viewers will decide for themselves whether the hopes of our Founding Fathers have been fulfilled and if their vision is shared by those now exercising power. **Streaming on PBS platforms and available for purchase through various retail outlets.**



Internet

YouGov.com

This website is indispensable for news junkies – or anyone determined to stay informed in a year when crucial midterm elections are scheduled. YouGov.com provides important election data, presidential approval ratings and a range of surveys on subjects as widely diverse as the popularity of holidays (Thanksgiving wallops Halloween) and the country’s favorite author. (Yep, Stephen King.) **A great service – and free.**



'A New Vision to Shape the Future'

continued from PAGE 1

and now his time has come," said Jim Longerbone, president of Local 11-M, St. Paul, Minnesota, and recently elected leader of the PPPWU Solidarity Conference.

As president, Castro represents a "new vision, a new hope," and opportunity to "shape the future," said Linde Shaw, who succeeded Castro as secretary-treasurer of District Council 3. "This is our union's moment."

Adding his support was Mike LaSpina, president of Local 406-C, Long Island. Castro, he said, had "the capability, knowledge and drive to lead" the international union.

Castro became PPPWU secretary-treasurer in June after his predecessor, Clark Ritchey, died unexpectedly. Achieving high union office was something he hardly could have imagined in 1998 when he joined the GCIU, Castro told DC-3 members in a letter.

"I honestly never thought that I would become an officer of this union, much less be given the opportunity to become the international president," Castro said.

He said the union "changed the course of my life" and, in turn, Castro vowed to preserve a labor organization that, for more than a century, has improved the lives of thousands of members.

Crucial to that goal is training the next generation of union leaders – one of Castro's top priorities. Shaw said Castro took "considerable time training and mentoring not only myself but everyone he works with." Castro, she said, "is always thinking of preparing those to lead next."

Castro told the Communicator he was determined to build the rank-and-file with traditional organizing methods while harnessing digital age methods including social media. "To thrive in the 21st Century we must use 21st Century methods," he said.

But, he said, little matches the sort of "one-on-one, shoe leather" outreach that brings union organizers in direct contact with unaffiliated workers. In that regard, he praised the energy and determination of international organizers Pedro Olguin and Ryan Janota.

"It is not a question of one organizing style or the other – but both," Castro told the Communicator. "We want to take full advantage of traditional methods and the field work of Pedro and Ryan but also find new ways to reach workers. The printing, packaging and production sectors have enormous potential and we must seize the opportunity and grow with the industries we represent."

Castro said he also would be relentless in countering efforts by the IBT to disrupt the PPPWU and lure away its members.

"We are strong, united and unafraid," Castro said. "And we are not going away."

Since the Teamsters unilaterally rescinded the 2004 merger agreement between the GCIU and IBT that formed the GCC/IBT and led to creation of the PPPWU three years ago, Teamster efforts to disrupt the new union have been relentless.



PPPWU PHOTO

Steve Nobles, right, who retired as PPPWU president last month, said there 'is no one in our organization better equipped' to lead the union than his successor, former secretary-treasurer Israel Castro. 'Israel is committed, fearless and innovative,' Nobles said. 'We're fortunate to have a person of Israel's caliber to take the PPPWU into the future.'

At the first PPPWU Solidarity Conference, officials and delegates in Atlanta renewed their commitment to union independence and autonomy and vowed to thwart a rogue Teamster campaign.

"They're using every trick in the book," said Robert Lored, Local 388-M, Los Angeles at the September meeting.

Castro is the sort of leader who will confront Teamster raiding tactics head-on, said Eddie Williams, president of Local 527-M, Atlanta. "He's not scared. You've got to have that."

Pat LoPresti, president of Local 1-L, New York, also said Castro had the ability to meet the "many challenges" facing the PPPWU. "Israel Castro is confident, determined and persistent. Our union needs to put its entire support behind him."

Among the immediate tasks facing Castro will be guiding the PPPWU through merger talks with a larger union.

Leaders say technology is reducing membership and joining forces with a



From My Perspective

BY STEVE NOBLES

Take Pride in PPPWU Strength and Solidarity

After more than two years as PPPWU president and decades as a labor official, I'm retiring – the right move for me personally and one that will allow our union to reach its full potential with younger leadership and new ideas.

Israel Castro, one of the most talented union professionals I have ever known, already is hard at work in the top leadership role. He is dedicated, forward-looking and, after years as principal officer of District Council 3, ready for the job.

It's not an easy assignment.

Israel takes over at a time of economic uncertainty and erratic leadership in Washington. Anti-labor forces work tirelessly to undercut unions and their members. And even within labor ranks there are those who would do damage to advance their own agendas.

At the PPPWU, we have come through a rough period – and shown strength and solidarity that should make us all proud.

After the Teamsters unexpectedly nullified the long-standing GCIU-IBT merger agreement and ended the GCC/IBT, we had a choice – fold or fight.

When IBT leaders found we would not roll over, they began an unconscionable campaign to drive us out of business. We met that test and, even now, continue blocking IBT attempts to raid our locals and cripple the union.

Our determination and sense of purpose were on display last fall when delegates from around the country gathered in Atlanta for the PPPWU's first Solidarity Conference.



In speeches from the podium and remarks from the floor, it was clear to me that our union has an unlimited future.

Veteran leaders provided necessary depth and background but the event was invigorated by younger union members eager to be heard. Their energy and ideas were inspiring.

This will be an eventful year for the PPPWU.

Almost surely, our union will affiliate with a larger labor group. But we will never relinquish our identity.

The PPPWU is here to stay.

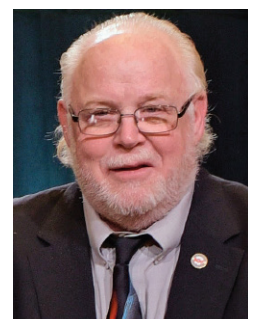
My plans?

I look forward to spending more time with family – together, my wife, Beth, and I have four children and five grandkids – and am grateful for the retirement security provided by a union pension.

I'll do some work in the community, show up at DC-3 golf tournaments and, most likely, you'll see me at major PPPWU events, too. I'm grateful for the chance I had to serve.

Our future is bright. There is no doubt. To the next generation of leaders – carry on. ■

Steve Nobles, former principal officer of District Council 3 and PPPWU secretary-treasurer, served as president of the union from Nov 1, 2023, until retirement Dec. 31, 2025. This is his final "From My Perspective" column.



prominent labor organization will assure the PPPWU's future and safeguard its identity, Castro said. "This is an inevitable next step in our development."

The general board has been discussing merger possibilities for months and is expected to advance the name of a potential partner early this year with the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers (IAM) appearing the most likely partner.

IAM President Brian Bryant spoke at the PPPWU Solidarity Conference in September and assured delegates the PPPWU would be welcome in a union that counts 600,000 active and retired members.

Addressing the vital question of union identity, Bryant, IAM leader for 15 years, promised the PPPWU could retain its independence and autonomy if a merger took place.

"Everyone who wants a union can have a union in the IAM," he said.

At another point, Bryant said that while there was great value in joining forces, he knew the value of autonomy.

"No one wants to be swallowed and gobbled up," he said.

After the board makes its decision, a merger proposal must be approved by delegates at a special convention and then ratified by the rank-and-file.

Castro promised any alliance would come with "our commitment to be a good merger partner" and a guarantee of PPPWU independence. "We are a proud and historic union and will go forward without losing our pride or personality," he said.

On a broader scale, Castro – like all labor leaders – must confront the harsh reality that union membership has been slipping for decades.

Last year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that just under 10 percent of American workers were unionized. In 1983, the first year similar data was available, union membership was 20.1 percent, according to the BLS.

More than 32 percent of public-sector workers are unionized, the BLS said, compared with 5.9 percent of private-sector employees.

Lagging union membership persists though public approval of organized labor continues to climb – a paradox that labor leaders find frustrating but also offers hope of a union resurgence.

"Majorities of Americans see the large reduction in the share of workers represented by unions over the past several decades as a bad thing for both the United States and its working people," said the Pew Research Center in a report last summer.

How to capitalize on the rise in positive public sentiment is a question that occupies union leaders around the country. For Castro, the answer inevitably returns to organizing.

"It's extremely important," Castro said. "The old saying, 'organize or die,' has never been more true."

It is a point often emphasized by PPPWU President Emeritus George Tedeschi, a six-decade union veteran who has carried out scores of organizing drives. Tedeschi said he is confident Castro will remain "tightly focused" on increasing the rank-and-file and obtaining the best contracts for our members.

"Israel is a savvy union leader with high ideals and exactly the right instincts," Tedeschi said. "I am eager to watch as he takes the PPPWU forward and builds the kind of base that assures success."

Marty Hallberg, president of District Council 1 expressed similar confidence in Castro's ambition, professionalism and character.

"His union morals and training will continue to move our great union forward in the direction demanded and expected by our membership," Hallberg said. "Israel is very skilled, has fresh ideas and a true vision." ■



*'We are strong,
united and unafraid.
And we are not
going away.'*

– PPPWU President Israel Castro

'Everyone Deserves Chance to Move Up'

By Dawn Hobbs
Special to the Communicator

As a child, Israel Castro moved from Gurabo, Puerto Rico, to the Chicago area – with the odds stacked against him.

Raised by a single mother during hard economic times, Castro and his family frequently moved throughout the Midwest.

"I grew up with a lot of people who thought they didn't have any opportunities – and they just never did anything with their lives," Castro said. "Some of my own relatives, quite frankly, even thought I was doomed."

But in 1998, at age 18, Castro landed a job at a Gannett paper, the Courier Journal in Louisville, Kentucky, represented by the GCIU, a predecessor union of the PPPWU.

Castro didn't know anything about unions – and didn't care.

That changed when, as a new apprentice, Castro injured his hand on a press roller and union officials helped protect his job during recovery. "They took a personal interest in a relatively new member," Castro said. "It's one of the best things that ever happened to me."

The union's intervention made such an impression on Castro that he quickly became involved with the local – attending membership meetings at Local 619-M, now part of Local 25-M, became a shop steward and began moving up the ranks.

"Our members need to know that if they work hard, and show dedication that they can advance," Castro said. "It's important that our union has allowed a culture for someone like me to move up like this. I never would have even thought that I would have gone from the pressroom floor to the international president."

Castro, 47, was elected president of District Council 3 in 2016 and became secretary-treasurer and principal officer in 2019. In the same year, he began serving as central regional representative on the general board of the GCC/IBT, another PPPWU predecessor.

From 2019 to 2025, Castro served as trustee for The Members Retirement Plan, formerly the Inter-Local/Teamster Members Retirement Plan. Last year, he was appointed international PPPWU secretary-treasurer, replacing Clark Ritchey, who died unexpectedly in June.

Castro says his service as a labor professional is meant as a gesture of gratitude for opportunities union membership has provided his family.

"The union allowed us to make enough money for my family to have a decent life," Castro said.

Castro and his wife, Sarah, have two sons. The elder, Miguel, 25, graduated from Cornell University in 2022 and is attending law school at Michigan State University. Isaiah, 22, is at Wayne State University majoring in computer science.

"In one generation, our family went from the projects to the Ivy League because the union gave us the opportunity to be able to pay our bills – and it gave us the ability to thrive, not just scrape by and barely survive, but to actually thrive," Castro said.

Castro says his journey is proof that union membership offers a route to success – even for those who once might have doubted their chances.



PHOTO COURTESY ISRAEL CASTRO

PPPWU President Israel Castro, second left, says union membership has allowed his sons, Isaiah, 22, left, a student at Wayne State University, and Miguel, 25, now in the Michigan State University College of Law shown here after graduation from Cornell University, and wife, Sarah, to enjoy a middle-class life that might otherwise have been out of reach. 'It's one of the best things that ever happened to me,' Castro said.

"This is very personal for me," Castro said. "I want to continue growing the union and to give other people the same opportunity that was given me to advance their careers and livelihoods. I am also very committed to preparing the next generation of leadership," he said.

Organized labor is an essential force in providing safeguards and security for workers in an economy increasingly dominated by billionaires with disproportionate influence on political leaders.

"If it wasn't for labor unions and pushing back, we'd be nowhere," Castro said. "This isn't about the haves and the have nots. It's about giving other people an opportunity to make their lives better. We have a moral obligation to do this." ■

‘Memorable’ First Solidarity Conference

By Deborah Morris
Special to *The Communicator*

My attendance at the PPPWU’s first ever Solidarity Conference held in Atlanta at the end of September was memorable.

The meeting drew delegates from the Newspaper, Specialty, Eastern and Midwestern conferences as well as officers from the international, district councils and PPPWU locals – a dynamic group of dedicated union activists.

It was memorable for me not only for the honor of being elected Solidarity Conference recording secretary but for the opportunity to make new friendships, reconnect with old colleagues and hear stirring stories of union commitment.

It felt good to be surrounded by like-minded people determined to protect workers’ rights and assure a decent, middle-class life for thousands of union members.

We worked hard – calling the conference to order, hearing reports from members from across the country, strategizing and planning the future of our union.

Delegates engaged a wide range of subject matter. There were updates on right-to-work developments, new labor laws and the impact of artificial intelligence on the newspaper industry and other PPPWU sectors.

Perhaps most dramatic were accounts of workplace experiences around the country – sobering reminders that too many businesses still try to take advantage of their employees. That’s why unions are so necessary – to protect workers and give them a voice in determining their wages and working conditions.

Hearing about ongoing attempts by the Teamsters to undermine and break our union was troubling.

But I came away invigorated and confident. It was clear from hearing the reports and personal anecdotes that we’re standing strong and moving forward.

The PPPWU is not afraid and we’re not backing down!

An important issue at the Atlanta sessions related to a likely merger with a larger labor organization – essential if the PPPWU is to continue as the leading labor organization in the printing, packaging and production fields.

Brian Bryant, president of the Machinists union, spoke powerfully about the need for a strong labor movement and the benefit of joining forces. He vowed that the PPPWU would retain its independence and autonomy if the unions merged – an essential condition.

While this was a business conference it also was an enjoyable time.

I met people whose names I regularly hear in discussions at Local 406-C, Long Island, where I serve as recording secretary when I’m not chasing stories for Newsday as a beat reporter.

The welcoming spirit I experienced in Atlanta was moving.

It was a pleasure meeting new colleagues such as Janice Bort, Local 72-C, Washington, who helped guide me as I took on recording secretary duties, and Scott Miller of DC-1, who seconded my nomination for the Solidarity Conference post.



‘I came away invigorated and confident,’ said Deborah Morris, Local 406-C, who was elected Solidarity Conference recording secretary.



Conversations with new colleagues and reunions with old friends helped make the Solidarity event in Atlanta memorable, said Deborah Morris, second left, who joined Local 406-C President Mike LaSpina, far left, and other officers elected at the September meeting. ‘I enjoyed the historic conference and look forward to more,’ Morris said.

And it was great reconnecting with union officials like Stephen Aichele of DC-3 and Chris Sclafani and John Zoccali, both of Local 1-L, New York.

Steve Nobles, who retired as PPPWU president last month and Israel Castro, who has moved from secretary-treasurer to president, displayed strong leadership and knowledge with a healthy dose of humor and good sense.

I spent time with many respected leaders, among them PPPWU President Emeritus George Tedeschi, who shared his wisdom and view of the union’s future, and Local 1-L President Pat LoPresti who provided valuable historical insight and context.

Sitting at my side throughout the three-day meeting was Mike Lasпина, president of my local, 406-C, who was elected executive vice president of the Solidarity Conference.

Mike has always been a supportive mentor to me and even ran down members in the meeting room to get their names so I could record them correctly in the minutes. I truly appreciate him.

A shout-out to Eddie Williams, president of Local 527-M, Atlanta, and his team for putting on the inaugural Solidarity Conference event and delivering such an impressive experience.

I really enjoyed the historic, first conference and look forward to many more.

In the meantime, I will take what I learned – stay committed, know your contracts, lean on each other – and apply it to my union work at 406-C and the Solidarity Conference.

I do not come from a union family. My dad was a CPA who had several union members among his clients. While disappointed I did not want to follow in his footsteps (math is not my strong suit), he was happy when I landed a job at Newsday – especially because it was a union shop.

Dad encouraged me to stay involved and attend meetings. I told him I would – and I did.

A few years ago, a vacancy opened on the 406-C executive board. Longtime secretary-treasurer Liisa May said she thought I would make a perfect recording secretary given what I do for a living and my regular attendance at union meetings. Step up, she said. Get involved.

After an inspiring and unforgettable experience at the Solidarity Conference, I’m more pleased than ever that I listened to Liisa – and my dad. ■

Deborah Morris serves Local 406-C, Long Island, and the PPPWU Solidarity Conference as recording secretary. She is a beat reporter at Newsday.

Great Idea Assures a Promising Future

By Zachary Dowdy
Special to *The Communicator*

For leaders like Enrico Lee, who has been a member of Local 705-S, Battle Creek, Michigan, since 2008, the Solidarity Conference in Atlanta did what it was designed to do: provide energy, fellowship and a heightened sense of purpose as the PPPWU looks toward the future, strong and united.

“I think it was very, very, very inspirational,” said Lee, who was elected Central Region vice president of the Solidarity Conference. “It was very much needed to build up the solidarity and camaraderie.”

The three-day meeting, held in September, brought together delegates from the Newspaper, Specialty, Eastern and Midwestern conferences for the first of what officials say will be an annual event aimed at fostering mutual support, providing information and addressing common union concerns.

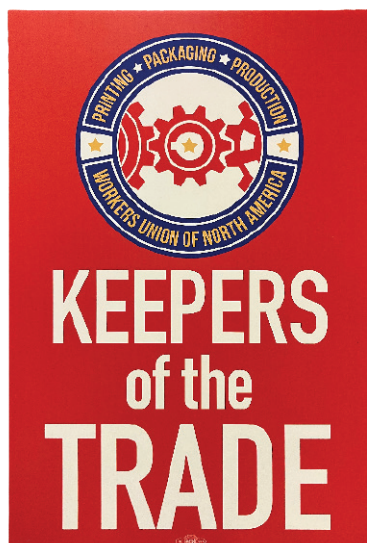
Lee’s positive assessment of the Atlanta sessions was widely echoed by delegates relatively new to the national PPPWU scene like Deborah Morris of Local 406-C, Long Island, and veterans like Harry Selnow, president of Local 612-M, Caldwell, New Jersey, who for years has organized or attended large union gatherings.

“The value is in the name itself – solidarity,” said Morris, a Newsday reporter who was elected conference recording secretary. “It’s a reminder that as we tackle issues in each of our workplaces we are not alone,” adding that the conference “offers opportunities to reaffirm connections.”

Exchanging ideas was a vital aspect of the meeting, said Selnow.

“I think it was very informational and we took a lot away from this conference,” he said.

Selnow said he hopes the future meetings will include more breakout sessions that



focus on organizing and negotiation tactics. “As word spreads, the conference will grow,” he said. “It got everybody sort of pumped. Everybody enjoyed themselves. “We are hoping to make it bigger each year.”

Other leaders agreed the Solidarity Conference has a promising future.

“I think the conference itself was a huge success,” said Marty Hallberg, vice president of Local 11-M in St. Paul, Minnesota and president of District Council 1. “For the first conference, I think it was very well accepted and we’re going to expand on that going forward and try and create additional workshops and things that are beneficial to all of our members.”

Bringing together representatives of the union’s major divisions was a welcome innovation, said Mike LaSpina, president of Local 406-C.

“Combining the four conferences was a great idea,” he said. “The turnout was great. The information was great, and I look forward to the next one.”

Hallberg joined other leaders in describing the mood at the conference as positive and supportive – the kind of environment where union leaders can speak, learn and get things done.

“I thought the mood was very uplifting,” he said. “I probably got a little choked up at times. Going forward it’s going to be very valuable for our members to learn and grow and excel.”

Israel Castro, the former PPPWU secretary-treasurer and DC-3 principal officer who became union president this month following the retirement of Steve Nobles, said delegates were pleased to gather under one roof with a single purpose.

“The mood was joyful,” he said. “I think the Solidarity Conference serves as a model for other union events. It was just great.” ■

IBT ATTEMPT AT IDEMIA PLANT IN PENNSYLVANIA IS BLOCKED WITH SPEEDY TEAM EFFORT

With a team effort, District Council 3 recently fought off an IBT raid at an Idemia plant in Exton, Pennsylvania and then gained a strong contract for the company's 180 PPPWU workers.

"This was a big win for DC-3," said Linde Shaw who succeeded Israel Castro as district secretary-treasurer last month after Castro became PPPWU president upon the retirement of Steve Nobles.

Leaders were preparing for contract negotiations when suddenly the shop was under siege, according to Shaw. "We had the Teamsters banging on the doors out there at the gates at 10 p.m."

PPPWU shop stewards and union officials responded quickly.

"I spent a lot of time inside talking to the people and keeping them updated," Shaw said. "The stewards were in there all of the time and we had Spanish-speaking organizer, Pedro Olguin, helping, too."

IBT representatives launched the raid attempt as Shaw and other DC-3 officials were working on contract proposals.

Negotiators received the help of PPPWU President Israel Castro during contract talks that provided health insurance upgrades and what Shaw said were "substantial raises."

The PPPWU and its predecessor union, the GCC/IBT has been representing Idemia workers for the past six years.

"We did very well and everyone was very happy," said Shaw. "I'm proud of the stewards and all of the members that stuck by DC-3 and realized the Teamsters were not the way to go."



PPPWU ACTS QUICKLY TO ASSURE LEADERS CAN 'WALK THE FLOOR' WITHOUT INTERFERENCE

Officials at Arandell Corp. in Wisconsin recently sought to prevent union leaders from meeting with members without a company representative nearby – anti-labor interference quickly reversed when PPPWU international officials stepped in.

"It was imperative that everyone be involved," said Jeff Vogel, president Local 577-M, Milwaukee. "It showed the company we were serious and that the whole union felt we had the right to walk the floor."

Maintaining hard-won union rights is essential, Vogel said.

"Our members did not feel comfortable with management escorting us and we couldn't do our jobs because the members couldn't honestly speak with us."

The PPPWU represents more than 300 members at Arandell's catalog publishing plant in Menomonee Falls.

District Council 1 President Marty Hallberg said it was especially important to not surrender access to members, especially in a right-to-work state.

"Enough emphasis cannot be put on this full team response and how we fought to maintain this," Hallberg said. "We have to be able to walk the floor and see our members. You need that sort of involvement here. This is how you get people to be part of the union and to be involved."

The effort involved shop stewards and the PPPWU organizing department, Hallberg said.

"This took extensive work, planning and investigation with help of everyone from Marty Hallberg all the way up to President Israel Castro and organizers Ryan Janota and Pedro Olguin," Vogel said. "It was incredible," Vogel said.

PPPWU leaders again walk through the shop without management officials at their side as has been the practice for decades, Vogel said.

"This shows the members we are here to protect their rights and shows the company we are here to represent the members and will continue to be very involved with them."

KNOW
YOUR
RIGHTS

CANADIAN LOCAL THWARTS RAID BY UNION SPREADING FALSE INFORMATION

While PPPWU leaders stifled Teamster raids in the United States, union officials in Ontario fought off similar attempts by the controversial Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC).

This latest CLAC raid was at the Dart Container Company in Markham, Ontario, where the PPPWU and its predecessor unions have represented members for more than 40 years.

"They swoop in during the open period and try to get cards signed and use QR codes and they try to trick people into signing up with them basically," said Greg Morley, president 100-M, Toronto. "They were trying to get cards signed right inside the plant and give out all kinds of false information but they didn't have much success. We got on it pretty quick."

Morley hailed the efforts of chief steward Barinder Bhanot who "saved the day with all of the work he did inside the plant and talking to people while I was fighting from outside the plant and calling people." Bhanot, he said, is a really seasoned steward and did a great job.

CLAC, widely considered a "company union," according to The Maple, a worker-oriented news site, is accused by critics of collaborating with employers to sign "sweetheart" contract deals.

After defeating the CLAC raiding campaign, Morley and his team negotiated a contract that earned workers a significant wage increase and preserved a defined benefit pension plan that management had threatened to discontinue.

Morely said his negotiating team was outstanding.

"There were new members on the committee and they did an outstanding job," he said. "They all stuck together and got a decent deal."



ART LITHOCRAFT CONTRACT PROVIDES IMPROVED HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

District Council 2 gained a three-year contract for PPPWU members at Art Lithocraft Co. in Kansas City, Missouri, that featured a significant improvement in health insurance coverage and wage increases for all members.

The new pact changes health plans from TeamCare to the DC-2 Kansas City Health and Welfare Fund, according to DC-2 executive secretary Sheila Castro, who said the switch allowed for lower premiums and savings for workers.

Pay hikes in the updated contract were described as "significant" by Castro and the result of what DC-2 Secretary-Treasurer Dan Cabada called a determined team bargaining effort.

"Representatives Fernando Aguiler and Kevin Huff did a great job negotiating this contract," Cabada said in a statement. "Mike Benedick also provided valuable assistance."

Founded in 1949, Art Lithocraft prides itself on a "hands-on approach to perfection," according to a company website, and offers "a rare combination of technology and craftsmanship."

Union leaders say the "craftsmanship" central to Art Lithocraft's success is provided by PPPWU members.



Local Stops wants to hear from you. If your PPPWU local has been involved in organizing efforts, community outreach or volunteer work, e-mail a brief summary to reporter Dawn Hobbs at dawnhobbs@cox.net or call 805-284-5351.

Castro se hace presidente del PPPWU; promete «orgullo y progreso»

Fred Bruning
The Communicator

En un importante reajuste de la dirección, el secretario-tesorero del PPPWU, Israel Castro, profesional sindical de 47 años con amplia experiencia a nivel local, de consejo de distrito e internacional, ha sustituido, de acuerdo con los estatutos del sindicato, a Steve Nobles, que se jubiló como presidente en diciembre tras dos años como máximo responsable.

Castro, que anteriormente fue director de organización del PPPWU y director del Distrito 3, asume el control en un momento de cambio y cautela, ya que el sindicato está sopesando la afiliación a una organización sindical más grande, a la vez que sigue resistiendo a los asaltos de los Teamsters en los locales del PPPWU y a los intentos de atraer a sus miembros a la IBT.

«No hay nadie en nuestra organización mejor preparado para asumir esta responsabilidad», dijo Nobles. «Israel es comprometido, intrépido e innovador. Tenemos suerte de contar con una persona del calibre de Israel para llevar al PPPWU hacia el futuro.»

Otros líderes sindicales aclamaron el paso de Castro a la presidencia y dijeron que su talento era evidente desde hacía tiempo.

«Cualquiera que haya tenido el placer de trabajar con Israel a lo largo de los años sabía que sería el líder de este gran sindicato en algún momento y ahora ha llegado su momento», dijo Jim Longerbone, presidente del Local 1-M, St. Paul, Minnesota, y líder recientemente elegido del Congreso de solidaridad del PPPWU.

Como presidente, Castro representa una «nueva visión, una nueva esperanza» y la oportunidad de «conformar el futuro», dijo Linde Shaw, que sucedió a Castro como secretaria-tesorera del Consejo del Distrito 3. «Este es el momento de nuestro sindicato.»

Castro se hizo secretario-tesorero del PPPWU en junio, tras la inesperada muerte de su predecesor, Clark Ritchey. Alcanzar un alto cargo sindical era algo que difícilmente podría haber imaginado en 1998, cuando se afilió al GCIU, dijo Castro a los miembros del Consejo del Distrito 3 en una carta.

«Sinceramente, nunca pensé que llegaría a ser directivo de este sindicato, y mucho menos que me darían la oportunidad de ser presidente internacional», dijo Castro.

Dijo que el sindicato «cambió el curso de mi vida» y, a su vez, Castro se comprometió a preservar un organismo sindical que, durante más de un siglo, ha mejorado la vida de miles de afiliados.

Castro dijo al Communicator que estaba decidido a expandir las bases con métodos de organización tradicionales, aprovechando al mismo tiempo los métodos de la era digital, incluidas las redes sociales. «Para prosperar en el siglo XXI debemos utilizar métodos del siglo XXI», afirmó.

Pero, según él, poco se puede comparar con el tipo de comunicación «individualizada y a pie» que pone a los organizadores sindicales en contacto directo con los trabajadores no afiliados. A este respecto, alabó la energía y determinación de los organizadores internacionales Pedro Olguín y Ryan Janota.

«No se trata de un estilo de organización u otro, sino de ambos», declaró Castro al Communicator. «Queremos aprovechar

plenamente de los métodos tradicionales y del trabajo de campo de Pedro y Ryan pero además encontrar nuevas maneras de alcanzar a los trabajadores» Los sectores de imprenta, embalaje y producción tienen un enorme potencial y debemos aprovechar la oportunidad y crecer con las industrias que representamos.»

Castro dijo que también sería implacable en la lucha contra los esfuerzos por parte de la IBT para trastocar el PPPWU y engatusar a sus miembros.

«Somos fuertes, estamos unidos y no tenemos miedo», dijo Castro. «Y no nos retiramos.»

Desde que los Teamsters rescindieron unilateralmente el acuerdo de fusión de 2004 entre el GCIU y la IBT que formó el GCC/IBT y condujo a la creación del PPPWU hace tres años, los esfuerzos de los Teamsters por alterar el nuevo sindicato han sido incesantes.

En el primer Congreso de solidaridad del PPPWU, los funcionarios y delegados renovaron en Atlanta su compromiso con la independencia y la autonomía sindicales y prometieron frustrar una campaña sin escrúpulos de los Teamsters.

«Utilizan todos los trucos posibles», afirmó Robert Loredó, del sindicato Local 388-M de Los Ángeles en el mitin en septiembre.

Castro es el tipo de líder que se enfrentará directamente a las tácticas de asalto de los Teamsters, dijo Eddie Williams, presidente del Local 527-M de Atlanta. «No tiene miedo. Esto es esencial.»

Una de las tareas inmediatas que le esperan a Castro será guiar al PPPWU en las negociaciones de fusión con un sindicato mayor.

Los dirigentes afirman que la tecnología está reduciendo el número de afiliados y que aliarse con una organización sindical destacada asegurará el futuro del PPPWU y salvaguardará su identidad, dijo Castro. «Es un paso inevitable en nuestro desarrollo.»

El consejo general lleva meses debatiendo las posibilidades de fusión y se espera que a principios de año avance el nombre de un posible socio, siendo la alianza con la Asociación Internacional de Maquinistas y Trabajadores Aeroespaciales [IAM, por sus siglas en inglés] la que parece más probable.

El presidente de la IAM, Brian Bryant, habló en el Congreso de solidaridad del PPPWU en septiembre y aseguró a los delegados que el PPPWU sería bienvenido en un sindicato que cuenta con 600,000 miembros activos y jubilados.

Al abordar la cuestión vital de la identidad sindical, Bryant, líder de la IAM durante 15 años, prometió que el PPPWU podría conservar su independencia y autonomía si se producía una fusión.

«Todo el que quiera un sindicato puede tenerlo en la IAM», afirmó.

Tras la decisión del Consejo, la propuesta de fusión debe ser aprobada por los delegados en un congreso extraordinario y ratificada por las bases.

Castro prometió que cualquier alianza vendría acompañada de «nuestro compromiso de ser un buen socio en la fusión» y una garantía de independencia del PPPWU. «Somos un sindicato orgulloso e histórico y seguiremos adelante sin perder nuestro orgullo ni nuestra personalidad», afirmó.

A PROUD LEGACY

continued from PAGE 4

«He's always been active in his community," Williams said. "I'm just so impressed with him and other young people who are coming forward. They bring a lot to the table. I am just ecstatic."

Historically, young Americans have been among the least politically engaged groups, studies show. However, participation of voters 18-29 improved in the last two presidential elections – up from 39 percent in 2016 to 47 percent in 2020 and 50 percent in 2024 – and analysts say the turnout may signal a more robust interest in civic life.

A study by the Pew Research Center found that concerns over the economy, jobs, housing, violence, social justice and climate change appear to be sending more young people to the polls.

Analysts at Tufts University in Massachusetts also studied the youth vote.

"The 2024 general election was a major opportunity for youth to exercise their democratic rights, use their political voices, and shape the future of the country," Tufts concluded.

For the labor movement, a motivated youth population represents great potential, leaders say.

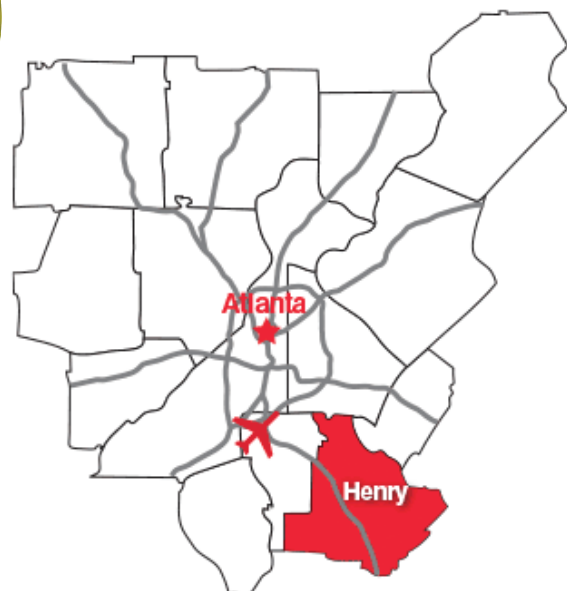
"It could really help to push our agenda and issues to the forefront of the political spectrum," Castro said.

For Jayden Williams, understanding the significance of workers' rights came at an early age with guidance from his great-uncle, Eddie Williams.

"My uncle pulled me into labor a long time ago," Williams said, recalling he once attended a pro-worker



Jayden Williams says he is part of a generation eager to 'build a community that represents not just us, but all people.'



Metro Atlanta Counties



Henry

demonstration at a FedEx facility and numerous other informational pickets with Eddie Williams.

Jayden Williams – whose father is the son of Eddie Williams' sister – said he has been dedicated to community service since he was 13 and began taking part in NAACP events.

He recently graduated from Clark Atlanta University with a bachelor's degree in political science and served in numerous campus leadership positions. Williams was active with the Stockbridge Youth Council and twice recognized by the White House Scholar Program for academic excellence.

The future?

Jayden Williams says he hopes his recent political victory is only the first. "I would just say that I look forward to serving not just Stockbridge, but communities and people across the country," he said.

In Memoriam

Listed here are members for whom death benefits were paid, according to the Graphic Communications Benevolent Trust Fund. Locals wishing to list members who died but did not participate in the death benefits program should contact The Communicator.

Local	Date of Death		Local	Date of Death		77P	Kenneth R Anderson	07-12-23	6505M	Leroy E Andren	05-07-23	119B	Abraham F Barrios Varga	07-27-23
Death Benefit Claims Paid						77P	John Knostenberg	03-07-23	6505M	James J Babin	07-13-23	119B	Salvatore Demasi	08-07-23
July 2023						119B	Joseph Ruffin	06-06-23	6505M	Regina H Null	05-31-23	119B	Phillip C Greco	01-06-23
1B	Micheal C Jacobs	04-11-23	853T	Roy E Greene	04-25-23	235M	Rodney E Dakon	06-21-23	6505M	Ralph E Smith	06-24-23	119B	Immacula Saint Preux	11-24-22
1B	Judith M Larson	02-28-23	853T	Gail T Gregory	12-03-22	235M	Riley D Perkins	07-01-23	6505M	Dean F Thomas	06-21-23	137C	Stephen J Giza	07-07-23
1L	Beatrice M Lenga	04-19-23	853T	Gus E Matthews	05-14-23	235M	Loretta L Sullivan	06-04-23				235M	Conception Chappell	01-08-23
1M	Jack E Maclean	12-29-22	999ML	Gloria H Cornell	01-21-23	285M	Beverly A Rockwell	05-22-23	Death Benefit Claims Paid					
2N	Kenneth J Byrnes	05-03-23	999ML	Lavonne E Hipsher	05-09-23	388M	Joe W Postelle	02-15-13	September 2023					
2N	Eugene R Mc Cauley, Sr	04-30-16	Death Benefit Claims Paid						388M	Vernon Clayton Texas Ra	05-01-23	1B	Laqueta Joy Schroeder	07-08-23
2N	Bernard Strauss	04-06-23	August 2023						406C	John J Basta	06-06-23	1B	Michael P Wicke	08-05-23
14M	Sylvia Mcneill	04-27-23	1B	Erma J Cooper	04-16-23	406C	Eugene M Kochniarczyk	05-24-23	458M	Donald E Avers	05-19-23	1L	Kenneth J Lauer	06-13-23
14M	Anthony J Romano, Sr	05-05-23	1L	Joseph Andretti	07-02-23	458M	Donald E Avers	05-19-23	458M	Fred R Barnick	06-02-23	1M	Ronald V Anderson	07-28-23
14M	Harry W Titus	04-15-23	1L	Paul Boyajian	05-04-23	458M	Fred R Barnick	06-02-23	458M	Edwin C Diversey	05-27-23	1M	Steven M Buechler	07-21-23
16N	Clayton L Trayer, Sr	05-02-23	1L	George F Harcher, Jr	01-04-23	458M	Edwin C Diversey	05-27-23	458M	Harris W Goss	06-30-23	1M	Glenn L Iverson	07-16-23
25M	Theodore W Shelton Sr	01-24-23	1L	Robert G Mitchell	05-13-23	458M	Harris W Goss	06-30-23	458M	James J Hartman Sr	06-28-23	1M	David M Rude	06-03-23
77P	Donald G Rank	04-29-23	1L	Guido R Pellicciaro	06-10-23	458M	James J Hartman Sr	06-28-23	458M	Raymond H Natzke	06-06-23	1M	Robert E Schuch	04-11-23
77P	Russell L Skinner	05-30-23	1L	John J Sokol, Jr	06-06-23	458M	Raymond H Natzke	06-06-23	458M	Robert S Ochalla	06-17-23	1M	June E Shaw	07-03-23
100M	Frank D Benny	12-27-22	2N	Salvatore L Balbi	04-20-23	458M	Robert S Ochalla	06-17-23	458M	Arthur B Schmit	06-29-23	1M	James H Slimmer	07-15-23
117T	Mark E Neuhaus	02-05-23	2N	Charles P Morris	06-25-23	458M	Arthur B Schmit	06-29-23	458M	John Talaga Jr	05-14-23	2N	Timothy B Downing	07-21-23
117T	James R Perrow	06-02-23	2N	Ronald J Rompala	06-23-23	458M	John Talaga Jr	05-14-23	458M	Freddie L Taylor, Jr	06-11-23	2N	Peter F Fegan	07-17-23
119B	Juan Ruiz	05-12-23	3N	Alan Gray	10-13-19	458M	Freddie L Taylor, Jr	06-11-23	518M	Cryil P Duff	06-22-23	2N	Richard J Kohrmann	07-23-23
119B	Robert E Shaw	05-17-23	4C	Anthony J Massare	07-02-23	518M	Cryil P Duff	06-22-23	555M	Real Maure	05-31-23	2N	James D Newell	07-06-23
137C	Robert M Chaney	05-24-23	14M	Robert L Gordon	01-19-23	555M	Real Maure	05-31-23	555M	Norberto Pereira	06-01-23	3N	Peter J Frank	06-15-23
285M	Robert J Farrell, Jr	10-24-22	14M	Arthur T Miller Jr	06-11-23	555M	Norberto Pereira	06-01-23	555M	Francoise Romeo	01-16-23	3N	Rae A Hall	07-14-23
285M	Phyllis Mae McGowan	05-12-23	14M	Leo J Nevrotski Jr	06-03-23	555M	Francoise Romeo	01-16-23	568M	Larry E Schultz	06-21-23	3N	Norman D Phillips	06-07-23
458M	Donald J Manella	05-16-23	24M	Robert K Krisovenski	06-02-23	568M	Larry E Schultz	06-21-23	572T	Cesar A Calderon	06-26-23	3N	Shirley M Ritchie	07-26-23
577M	Frederick O Brandenburg	06-08-23	24M	Charles T Matthews, Jr	12-27-22	572T	Cesar A Calderon	06-26-23	572T	Donald R Peterson	01-21-23	4C	James E Murphy Jr	07-07-23
612M	Anna D Zacccone	04-14-23	24M	Anthony J Welka	05-14-23	572T	Donald R Peterson	01-21-23	14M	Dennis P Collopy	05-28-23	555M	Mario Lamontagne	06-23-23
												555M	Benoit Martin	06-03-23

Ralph Meers, Union Icon and ‘Voice for the Vulnerable’

By Fred Bruning
The Communicator

Ralph Meers, a widely respected and beloved union official who led Local 527-S, Atlanta, for more than 50 years, braved harassment in the deep South as a labor organizer, ran for public office in hopes of giving voice to the voiceless and whose deep religious conviction guided him toward a life of service, died Oct. 2. He was 85.

Outspoken and unyielding in his support of equal justice, Meers led many strikes and demonstrations, met with civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, chatted with Jimmy Carter before the former Georgia governor became U.S. President, and started a health and welfare fund that continues to provide union members security and affordable care.

In a tribute, Meers’ family described him as an “advocate for the underdog and a tireless voice for the vulnerable.” Meers advanced “the rights of working families with passion and integrity,” family members said.

His belief in the power of unions was fundamental. By organizing, Meers knew, workers could gain respect, earn a decent living and look forward to a stable future,

“He wanted to ensure that people were treated fairly, that they were paid what they were worth,” said Debra Bailey, one of Meers’ three daughters. Bailey said her father rarely spoke about his work or accomplishments. “We would ask him what he did, and he would say, ‘I help people.’”

Meers’ reputation for decency and determination was well known in the ranks of his home local – now 527-M – and among PPPWU members and leaders.

“Brother Ralph Meers was an icon in our union,” said PPPWU President Israel Castro. “He was a man who truly dedicated his life to the labor movement.”

Eddie Williams, who succeeded Meers as local president in 2018, called Meers a “father figure” and “great mentor” whose devotion to the union and its members was extraordinary.

“He had great love and passion for the union” and put nothing before his work as a labor leader, Williams said. “I learned a lot from him.”

Born in Draketown, Georgia, on November 28, 1939, Meers found employment as a young man at Mead Packaging, an Atlanta paper company.

He became a member of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants’ Union (IPPAU) in 1957, served as a shop steward and sergeant-at-arms at Local 527-S and then moved into leadership ranks as vice-president and president.

In 1973, Meers formed the Specialties & Paper Products Union No. 527 Health and Welfare Fund and served as its chairman. He subsequently expanded the fund to include a supplemental pension and 401(k) plan. In related work, Meers was active with the non-profit International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans which provides information to professionals in the benefits industry.

Meers gained a reputation as a union official with outstanding devotion, energy and courage.

He ran organizing campaigns throughout the South – sometimes with black colleagues – that often met hostility.

During one campaign, the company described Meers and his allies as “communists” and “union thugs.” In another instance, opponents put sugar in the gas tank of his car hoping to deter his efforts.



PHOTO BY PATRICIA MITCHELL/LOCAL 527-M

Meers persevered against all attempts at intimidation. “They were mighty foolish and just trying to put fear in us to keep us from organizing,” Meers told the Graphic Communicator, forerunner of The Communicator, in 2017.

Bailey said her father did not talk about the dangers he faced. But, she said, “there were times when my mother was really concerned for his safety.”

Religious faith was a central factor in Meer’s life, family members said.

“Religion was very important to my father,” said Bailey. But, she said, her father, a deacon at First Baptist Church, Powder Springs, Georgia, would not join a congregation that clashed with his “progressive way of thinking.”

As a member of the PPPWU and its various predecessor unions, Meers was a familiar presence at local, regional and national union events often offering prayers in what Castro recalled as “preacherly style” at the opening of business sessions. “He had faith in God which guided his actions,” Castro said.

Meers frequently spoke from the dais, hailing delegates for their work and encouraging them to carry on. In hallways and at meals, Meers was an amiable conversation partner always ready to discuss union matters or national affairs.

George Tedeschi, PPPWU president emeritus, remembers Meers with respect and affection.

“I knew and worked with Ralph for over 50 years,” Tedeschi said. “We were the young guys in decades past and eventually became old warhorses who attended every major union function and collaborated on major issues. His contributions can’t be overstated. He was a man of great decency and devotion. It was an honor to know him.”

In 1985 Meers was recognized by the Workmen’s Circle, a nationwide equal rights organization now known as the Workers’ Circle – which named him “Outstanding Labor Leader of the Year.” He was active in his Dallas, Georgia, community and a member of the Shriners and Masons.

To all, Meers was known as a patient and wise leader. “He was someone you could go to and ask for advice and it was always the best,” said Patricia Mitchell, 527-M office administrator who worked with Meers for more than 30 years.

Outgoing PPPWU President Steve Nobles said Meers was “always ready to offer help” and had been among the union’s most notable leaders. “Ralph was a great man,” Nobles said.

Meers retired as Local 527-S president in 2018 but did not slow down.

He briefly entered the political arena and ran as a Democrat for the Georgia House of Representatives. Meers lost to his Republican opponent but winning wasn’t the only objective.

“Duty dictates that I fight for our values and positive change,” he told the Graphic Communicator. “We have so much that needs to be done.”

In their testimonial to Meers, his family urged all who admired him to reflect his values.

“Ralph’s purpose in life was always clear: to make the world a better, fairer place. To honor his memory, the family invites you to do the same – call someone you haven’t spoken to in a while, stand up for what you believe in, or help someone in need. That’s how Ralph lived every day, and it’s how his legacy will live on.”

Meers is survived by Bailey and two other daughters, Patricia Turner and Teresa Hill; three sisters; numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. His wife, Sarah Frances Akins Meers, died in 2011.

A memorial for Meers is being planned. Family members asked that those wishing to honor Meers send contributions to the Calvary Children’s home, Powder Springs, Georgia, or Masonic Home of Georgia in Macon, also a facility for children.

AI Assisting Neurodiverse Workers

Artistic employees are getting support on the job from an unexpected source – artificial intelligence.

“AI” is taking notes, filling out schedules, improving office communications and tackling other tasks that might have proven difficult for workers with conditions like autism, dyslexia and attention deficit disorder (ADHD), according to CNBC, the cable business news channel.

Artificial Intelligence even is allowing “neurodiverse” people to better gauge emotions of participants in video conferencing sessions, CNBC said.

Neurodiverse workers frequently are in demand because many are especially focused and creative, according to CNBC. Some research shows that companies who hire neurodiverse people generate one-fifth more revenue than those with less inclusive employment practices.

AI has been a great ally for workers who once had to contend with “a work culture not built with them in mind,” said CNBC.

Tara DeZao, a marketing official diagnosed with ADHD as an adult, said she welcomed the assistance of artificial intelligence.

“One of the most difficult pieces of our hyper-connected, fast world is that we’re all expected to multitask,” DeZao said, according to CNBC. “With my form of ADHD, it’s almost impossible to multitask.”

AI has made a difference.

“I’ve white-knuckled my way through the business world, but these tools help so much,” DeZao said.



California Gig Drivers Can Unionize

The 800,000 drivers working for Uber, Lyft and other “rideshare” companies in California have won the right to collectively bargain thanks to a law signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom and hailed by organizers as a “game changing” development that will give workers the chance to join unions and earn a decent living.

California Gig Workers Union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and other labor organizations say the average California rideshare driver nets \$9.75 an hour, far less than the state’s minimum wage, according to PAI Union News Service.

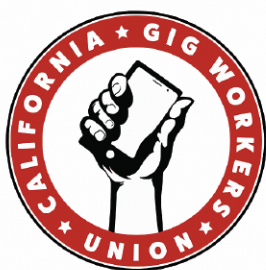
Though a clear victory for workers, the law does not change their status as “independent contractors” which means drivers remain ineligible for benefits like overtime pay, paid sick leave and unemployment insurance, according to CNN.

California Gig Workers United (CGWU) said passage of the law – known as AB1340 – represents the end of a decade-long struggle.

“This year, we won AB1340, a game-changing state law that gives us the right to form a union and bargain with gig rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft,” the group said in a statement.

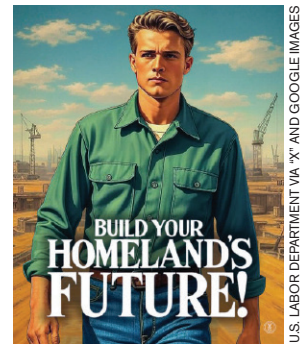
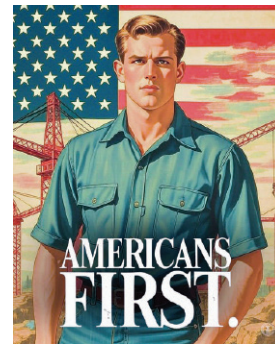
Gig driver Ana Barragan, of Los Angeles, said in a statement the law gave workers a chance to “fight back” against unfair company practices and a faceless corporate bureaucracy represented only by a smart phone “app.”

“We’ve worked long hours, faced disrespect, and had no voice, just silence on the other end of the app, Barragan said, according to the Associated Press. “But now, with the right to organize a strong, democratic union, I feel hope.”



CALIFORNIA DRIVES PROGRESS

Gig rideshare workers demand a voice on the job.



U.S. LABOR DEPARTMENT VIA "X" AND GOOGLE IMAGES

DOL Images: Racial ‘Dog Whistle?’

The Labor Department’s worker-themed social media postings have a new look – all white.

Under President Joe Biden, the DOL circulated images of a diverse workforce featuring men and women of varied backgrounds.

No more.

Artwork on the DOL’s “X” thread – formerly Twitter – are idealized representations of young white men.

Noting the labor department’s “dramatic shift” in approach, the Washington Post said the images – perhaps generated by artificial intelligence – are related to what the Trump Administration claims is an effort to advance the interests of American workers. The DOL says its “Operation Firewall” campaign is aimed at limiting the abuse of H-1B visas allowing foreign workers to be hired on a temporary basis.

Labor Department officials deny any attempt to glorify white workers but art critics, labor activists and political figures have raised concerns about the heroic poster-like DOL images posted and similarity to European fascist propaganda.

“This isn’t a dog whistle,” Judy Conti, director of government affairs at the National Employment Law Project, told the Post. “This is a loud trumpet blaring that white men who are supporting their wives and children are worthy of good jobs.”

Most of the portrayals, says the Post, show blond, blue-eyed white men with “sharp jawlines, broad shoulders and blue-collar uniforms.” Only one includes a non-white man, the Post said, and that person is shown with a white man and woman.

In a related development, the family of revered American artist Norman Rockwell objected publicly to the use of Rockwell’s famous paintings by the Department of Homeland Security in nationalistic social media postings urging Americans to “DEFEND your culture.”

Writing in USA Today, the family said Rockwell believed in “compassion, inclusiveness and justice for all.”



Leo Hails Unions as Force for Good

The Pope is pro-union.

Meeting with labor leaders from his home city of Chicago, Pope Leo said labor unions demonstrated the value of working people and served as a powerful agent for social equality.

Of particular importance, the Pope said, was the role of organized labor in “broadening the participation and inclusion of minorities in the labor movement through apprenticeships and training,” according to the Vatican News.

Also, the Pontiff said, unions deserved credit for aiding immigrants and refugees by supporting shelters and food pantries.

“I encourage you to continue to advocate for society to respect the human dignity of the most vulnerable,” Leo said.

Union officials said their encounter with Leo had been inspirational, according to the National Catholic Reporter.

Robert Reiter, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, said the Pope “validated many of the things we do.” The experience was profound and uplifting, he said. “The whole thing was amazing.”

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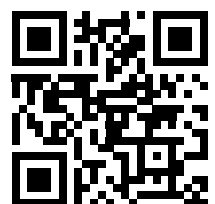
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PARTICIPANT NAME	LOCAL	DOD	BENEFICIARY NAME
John L Sullivan	M285	3/2025	John P Sullivan

HELP NEEDED FINDING MISSING TMRP MEMBERS

Below is a list of individuals in The Members Retirement Plan (formerly Inter-Local/Teamster Members Retirement Plan) who did not respond to previous notices about their current pension benefits and for whom the plan has no contact information. To avoid loss of benefits, members should immediately call TMRP in St. Charles, Illinois, at 630-752-8400. This notice is final.

Name	Local	WILLIAM H BIRDSEYE	503M	HENRY ALDRIN		RUSSELL O EDLUND	458M	LYNETTE CRESSLER	458M	CARL O HARDY	285M	DEBORAH KELLY	011M
EMANUELA M ELL	001L	ROBERT L DAILEY	017M	JANE ALLEY	572T	JANET GIBBONS	014M	BARBARA WALLACE	458M	G.GRACE THOMAS	117T	JOAN PENNINGTON	458M
BERNICE L TOKARSKI	458M	ADLYNE MANGINE	011M	JAMES G MASCOW	458M	HUGH T MOORE	235M	DONALD G BROWN	025M	LEONARD D'ANTONIO	014M	CAROL HOOVER	577M
ROSE A RASILE	001L	ALFRED GLOTFELTY	117T	MICHAEL R SAWYER	458M	MARGARET SLUSARCYK	014M	CONRAD B WEISE		THOMAS R HUGHES-DAVIES	117T	DELORES RUSSO	458M
ELEANOR JUST		RICHARD C MARCHAND	014M	BEVERLY A TORGERSON	011M	AMELIA PERRONE	014M	MARILYN L LEE		RICHARD DEROSA	001L	JEROME MCCULLEN	011M
ROBERT W PENNINGTON	458M	ALICE LARSON	458M	HAROLD A GRIESE	571M	AMBROSE LANIER	458M	THOMAS C BARBERA	577M	LILLIAN T MARTIN	235M	MARY OSTERFELD	025M
ANNETTA PIAZZA	014M	C.JOHN FIORIO	458M	JOHN P HERBST	011M	EDWARD D ZAPP	001L	ALBERT C KRAWCZYK	458M	THERESA A PALENIK	458M	PEGGY GLENN	458M
FRANK P CANNON	572T	IRIS J HASTINGS		JEAN M MORRELL		EDWARD A SHORT	700	JOY M LANG	572T	JOHN C ECKERT	014M	RUTH CONNELLY	014M
JUANITA LOOSEVELT	458M	FERNANDO V BONADA	572T	BRUCE B MILLER	572T	CARL A NELSON	458M	DOUGLAS L MARCOTT	235M	ROGER D OLSON		MARY HESS	577M
LUCY Y MATSUNAGA	996T	SAMUEL COHEN	001L	JOE ARROYO	4535M	JOAN M FUHRMANNECK	014M	JAMES M CRACE	025M	GLORIA E HAWKINS	014M	CLARA HOLEWA	458M
FRANK G GRABARZ	001L	DONALD W NAMYST	458M	ROY H ARAKAKI	996T	PHILIP ALBANESE	001L	JAMES L CASEY	001L	RENEE M CUESTAS	996T	CHARLES WALSH	001L
FLORA REINO		GERALDINE QUINN	458M	DOREEN E HOLMES	503M	FRANK N MAZZARO	001L	RAQUEL BAUER	025M	ROBERT A KEMLAGE	001L	MARILYN SPEARS	
MINEKO KIMURA	011M	JOHN J LYNDEES	001L	RICHARD G CERBARANO	03N	JUNE A WETZEL	458M	PAULINE REEVES	458M	JOHN A SERVAS	503M	DIXIE CHO	996T
BEVERLEE BOHMER	572T	MARY P BUSH	285M	CHARLES BURTON	458M	FRANCIS T LESTER	285M	HERBERT W ABDILL	285M	MICHAEL A ZAWADSKI	011M	KENNETH DANZER	117T
LEE ROCHA	458M	GEORGE W HAMMER JR	025M	CARESSE FILMON	025M	ELEANOR M LICALZI	014M	REUBEN CASTILLO	572T	ULRIC A PERSIA JR	001L	BARABRA JOHNSON	458M
JEAN E SCOTT	011M	FRANCES L MCCARDIE	235M	HELEN C WECKER	285M	JOAN D MCDONOUGH	011M	PATRICIA A LIEVENS	518M	JACQUELYN STOEHR	011M	YOLANDA G OBERMAIER	458M
VERA M LEISS	001L	ANDREW G MC CALL	014M	RICHARD J MAGEE		RICHARD ADAMS	572T	NANCY CASSIDY		ETHAN A CALVIN	011M	KIYOKO ZILLIGEN	458M
JEANNE M SORENSEN		WILLIAM S BONGARD	503M	SILIO F RODRIGUEZ	025M	MARILYN A GARBER	235M	BEVERLY COFFEY	001L	JOAN E WASIELEWSKI	458M	OLIVE BEHMKKE	577M
ELVERA M LUBERTS	011M	CLEMENT E JAWORSKI	025M	WILLEM M HARINCK	117T	JEROLD B KIESOW	577M	DAVID MEYER	024M	PAT SAVOIA	458M	DOLORES HUMPHREYS	011M
RICHARD J SUDD		CLIFFORD J ECHOLS	235M	ARLENE FRANCONI	458M	FAYE EWING	117T	IRENE K TABATA	996T	DORIS VENEZIA	014M	ARLENE COURTLEY	572T
DELORES D COVERT	117T	JAMES P JENKINS	025M	MARY R MUNDA	458M	JOSEPH B PILZ	001L	JOHN I WIGGINS	003N	WILLIAM LIPINSKI		DOROTHY FOWLER	458M
THELMA J KEEFE	001L	EVELYN RIPLEY	117T	CHARLIE WALTON	572T	JAMES L KINNEY	079L	WILLIAM G BAKER	572T	WILLIAM E JENKINS		ROBERTO RAMIREZ	572T
GEORGE J VERESPY	003N	CHARLENE FRANCONI	458M	DENNIS H JOHNSTON	458M	JOHN P HOLT	458M	DORIS SINTON	014M	RUBEN R MARTINEZ	572T	PATRICIA SMITH	25M
RITA B BEATTY	001L	MARY R MUNDA	458M	NIKKI M YORK	458M	JAMES A RUDNICK	117T	PATRICIA GRANT	117T	GERALD B MEAGHER	003N		
MARY E TETERS	117T	EVELYN RIPLEY	117T	SYLVIA DZIADOSZ	002N	BETTY L KAY	014M	CARL KAGEBEIN	458M	WILLIAM J CASAGA	572T		
DONALD F MORTZFIELD	014M	CHARLIE WALTON	572T	WESLEY E WRISTEN	518M	GLORIA BIALEK	458M	LEE A DOERING	025M	JOANNE SCHULTZ	011M		
		CAROL J RADZIN	458M			WILLIAM HARDER	518M	CHRISTOPHER J JOYCE	001L	MOLLIE JOHNSON	002N		

Funny Business

