Delegates Elect Hill as CWA Secretary-Treasurer; Third Term for Cohen

At-Large Board Members, District, Sector Officers Also Elected

CWA President Larry Cohen was elected to a third term in office by delegates to the 73rd CWA Convention this week, and Annie Hill, formerly the union's executive vice president, was elected as secretary-treasurer.

"I am so proud to be standing here today and will be working hard with all of you to make our union and our country the best it can be," Hill said. "We will not just fight back, but we will fight forward."

Hill's former position will not be filled. Under a change to the CWA Constitution approved by delegates at the 2011 convention as a cost-savings measure, CWA will no longer have an executive vice president.

By acclamation, convention delegates elected CWA President Larry Cohen to a third term.

Below: Newly Elected CWA Secretary-Treasurer Annie Hill, formerly EVP, takes her oath of office.
In other national CWA elections, At-Large Executive Board Members Carolyn Wade (Northeast Region), Nestor Soto (Southeast Region) and Madelyn Elder (Western Region) were re-elected, and Greg Wynn (Midwest Region) was elected to the seat held by Claude Cummings, who was elected as CWA District 6 vice president.

In the other districts, delegates re-elected Vice Presidents Chris Shelton (D-1), Ed Mooney (D-2-13), Judy Dennis (D-3), Seth Rosen (D-4), Mary Taylor (D-7) and Jim Weitkamp (D-9).

In CWA sectors with elections, delegates re-elected Vice Presidents Ralph Maly, Telecommunications and Technologies; Brooks Sunkett, Public, Health Care and Education Workers; Jim Joyce, National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians; and Jim Clark, IUE-CWA. Earlier this year, Vice President Bernie Lunzer, TNG-CWA, was re-elected, and Vice President Veda Shook, AFA-CWA, was elected.

Additionally, Dan Wasser was elected as executive officer of the Printing, Publishing and Media Workers sector.

The only election still outstanding is for the CWA Canadian director. Voting has been delayed there because of a postal strike.

All the newly elected and re-elected CWA officers and board members were sworn in by CWA President Emeritus Morton Bahr.

In her remarks, Hill said CWA has a great deal to be proud of despite the union's many challenges. She especially praised CWA's aggressive and growing Legislative Political Action Team-led campaigns to fight state and federal attacks on workers' rights and the economic security of working families.

One important way the LPAT program is succeeding is by building new alliances and joining together for major collective action, such as last October's One Nation march in Washington, D.C., Hill said.

"Many natural allies and supporters exist within the human rights communities outside CWA and we have come a long, long way in the last few years to strengthen and add meaning to these relationships," she said. "It is not enough anymore to send dollars, attend conferences and to support their causes. We need them to support us also and understand and work to restore collective bargaining rights in our country. It is the first step to make our country a better place."

In closing remarks to delegates, some of whom supported opposing candidates for various CWA offices, Cohen said, "We saw what democracy looks like at this convention."

"We march out of here as one union, stronger than ever," Cohen said. "When we work, when we organize,
Cohen: 'We Need to Be in the Streets As Well As at the Ballot Box'

Today's tough economy and political attacks demand a "broader, deeper" movement, organizing not just new union members but building alliances that will make it clear where America's true majority stands, CWA President Larry Cohen said Monday in his convention address.

"We need to be in the streets as well as at the ballot box," Cohen told the 1,600-plus delegates, retirees, family and friends at the 73rd CWA convention. "We need the energy and intensity of Madison, Wisconsin, or Cairo, Egypt. We need to unite with non-labor groups who share our vision of restoring the American Dream for working families."

As history proves, collective bargaining rights are essential to that dream, Cohen said. In both the United States and Canada, as bargaining coverage grew from the 1930s to the 1960s, "we negotiated real improvements in living standards — better health care, better pensions, higher wages and expanding organizing rights, and we expected that our children and grandchildren would have a better life," he said.

But as bargaining rights declined, everything changed. Despite still-growing worker productivity, workers' wages have stagnated while "CEOs keep getting richer because they are writing the rules," Cohen said.

"Bargaining rights are critical to any functioning democracy," he said. "And they are critical for a functioning economy."

Drawing rousing cheers from delegates, Cohen unveiled a short new video showing CWA in action with its partners in recent battles. Click here to watch it. "This is movement building. This is what democracy looks like," Cohen said.

Click here to read President Cohen's full speech, which is posted on CWA's website.

Rechenbach: Strong, Vibrant Labor Movement Will Restore America

In a farewell convention speech filled with his trademark humor, retiring Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Rechenbach outlined the challenges CWA faces but also its strengths: dedicated activists and leaders with a shared passion to make things better for members, their families and all workers.

"It is what we all in this room hold in common — the desire to make things better for our coworkers and our nation, to gain respect on the job and dignity in the workplace, to bring economic security to the homes of our members," Rechenbach said.

Doing so is a bigger challenge than ever, he said, pointing to the soaring gap between what American workers and CEOs earn, and the country's extreme inequality of wealth.
"Anyone want to guess how long it would take for the average CWA member to earn what the top hedge fund manager earns in one year? 35,217 years," Rechenbach said. "Oh, and by the way, you currently pay a tax rate that is more than double what the hedge fund manager pays."

The rich "aren't getting richer in this country because they are smarter," he said. "The people with incomes over a million dollars aren't the teachers who shape our children's minds and characters, they aren't the factory workers on an assembly line or the construction workers building a new home, they aren't the scientists searching for a cure for cancer, they certainly aren't the telephone workers, newspaper reporters, flight attendants, call center workers, printers, TV technicians or public workers that belong to our union."

Rechenbach discussed the many ways CWA has tightened its belt financially, from leasing out large portions of the headquarters building, to staff reductions through attrition, to agreements from both union and exempt staff to forgo raises and accept health and pension benefit changes. Further, he said, CWA officer salaries remain among the lowest in the labor movement.

Under Rechenbach's leadership, CWA has also reduced its number of fulltime officers, merging Districts 2 and 13 and the Telecom and C&T offices, and eliminating the executive vice president position, held until this week by Annie Hill. Delegates elected Hill to succeed Rechenbach as secretary-treasurer.

While CWA, its members and working families nationwide are doing everything they can to be financially responsible and continue to make ends meet, Wall Street and CEOs are enriching themselves and shipping jobs overseas, and through their money have a direct line to Congress to write the rules that benefit only them, Rechenbach said.

"The only hope to turn around this nightmare cycle of wealth distribution to the top is a strong and vibrant labor movement," he said. Our opponents "will do anything and everything they can to crush us, but as the song goes, like a tree standing by the water, we shall not be moved."

**Rep. George Miller: 'All of Us Together Will Win This Fight'**

Firing up CWA convention delegates Monday, one of Capitol Hill's truest champions for workers and their rights condemned the anti-union corporate ideology that is gripping Washington and threatening to strangle America's middle class.

"There is a war on labor, and that's what you have to understand and what your neighbors have to understand, whether they're union members or not," U. S. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) said. The ideologues "know that unions are the rock of resistance, and that we can't have a strong middle class without unions. The employers know it and the Republicans know it."

The more they can weaken organizing and bargaining rights, the bigger their share of the pie, and the less power unions have to energize and mobilize millions of
people to fight back, Miller said.

"I fundamentally believe that the future of our country rests on a strong middle class, and a strong middle class depends on strong unions," Miller said, describing some of the many ways that workers and the economic security of their families are at risk.

From attempts to destroy the National Labor Relations Board to support for unfair trade pacts that ship American jobs overseas, demands to reverse even minimal Wall Street reform and the new push to privatize Medicare and Social Security, Big Business and its Republican enablers in Congress will stop at nothing to undermine the middle class, Miller said.

Their Medicare scheme, for instance, would make it impossible for the vast majority of Americans to afford quality medical care in retirement. "For a 54-year-old, you'd better find another $182,000 to save over the next decade just to pay for their plan," Miller said. "If you're younger than 54, you'll have to save even more."

But Miller pledged to never give up and said he knows that CWA won't either. "I will work every day as hard as I can, I will fight every day as hard as I can, and all of us together will win this fight," he said.

**Short-Term Funding Resolution Aims to Strengthen Locals, National**

To strengthen CWA in a tough economy that has cost jobs and members, convention delegates on Tuesday adopted a resolution to redistribute, for two years, part of the income generated by the union's Strategic Industry Fund.

The goal is to ensure that locals and headquarters have the resources needed in today's brutal battles for bargaining rights and fair contracts. "This action will provide CWA with some breathing space to fight the attacks on collective bargaining and develop longer-term solutions," the resolution states.

Specifically, local unions will receive $20 per member who contributes to the Members' Relief Fund for the fiscal years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 to help them maintain and build power. An equal amount of the redistributed SIF funds would go to the international union to support programs and services that are vital to helping locals and members.

The distribution, providing about $6 million annually for both locals and the international based on current SIF income, would leave an estimated $10 million each year for new strategic campaigns.

Under an amendment to the resolution proposed and approved by delegates, CWA will have a discussion at the 2012 local presidents' meeting about strategy for building the union while restoring its financial footing.

**Delegates Commit to Action, Alliance-Building to Fight Key Threats**

**Resolutions Focus on Medicare, Voter Suppression, Colombia, State Battles**
From protecting Medicare to opposing the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, stopping voter suppression and battling state attacks on workers' rights, resolutions that CWA convention delegates passed this week had a central theme: Taking action and continuing to build a broad-based movement to fight back.

The resolutions are posted in full on the CWA website. You'll find a separate newsletter story on Resolution 1. Here's a summary of the other four:

- CWA will join with progressive allies in an aggressive campaign to oppose the Republican House plan to turn Medicare into a voucher program, forcing seniors to pay far more out of pocket for health care or go without. In August, when House members hold town hall meetings in their home districts, CWA and allies will be there in force.

- Anti-democratic forces in states across the country are enacting new voter ID laws and other ways to suppress voter turnout, mainly affecting students, minorities, seniors and the poor. CWA will fight this new threat to democracy through education and movement-building, and will participate with the AFL-CIO and other allies to document abuses during the 2012 elections.

- To oppose the Colombia Free Trade Deal, each local president will write a letter to his or her member or Congress, and the union will generate another 5,000 contacts from CWA members. The Colombia deal not only would hurt U.S. workers, it would appear to sanction the country's horrifying lack of workplace rights and protections. Nearly 3,000 union activists have been murdered in Colombia in the last 25 years, including 17 to date in 2011.

- As locals and districts continue to build alliances to fight grave assaults on workers' rights in Ohio, New Jersey, Wisconsin and other states, many new actions are planned. CWA will work with Move On to organize summer "Rebuild the American Dream" house parties; "We Are One" actions in August will hold elected officials accountable for their anti-worker agenda; and CWA supports the historic Aug. 27 march on the National Mall for jobs and justice, called "From the Emancipator (Lincoln) to the Liberator (Martin Luther King, Jr.)." A national memorial to Dr. King will be unveiled on the Mall the next day.

Districts 2-13, 3 Honored for Big Win After 10-Year Fight at Piedmont

Ramp Agent: 'Now We Have a Voice That's Speaking Very Loud'
Abdur-Rahim Bilal, a worker who helped organize fellow Piedmont ramp and gate agents, tells delegates that "We knew CWA had our backs" in the decade-long campaign.

CWA's highest honor, the President's Annual Award, was presented this year to District 2-13 and District 3 for their exhaustive efforts over 10 years to organize more than 3,000 passenger service agents at Piedmont Airlines.

Piedmont workers voted overwhelmingly for CWA representation in November 2010, unswayed by management's relentless anti-union campaign and the union-busting consultants the company hired.

"We stood strong," Charlotte, N.C.-based Piedmont ramp agent Abdur-Rahim Bilal, a leader of the agents' long campaign, proudly told CWA delegates Tuesday. "We stood up against them, we put our jobs on the line. We fought hard to join an organization that we knew would stand up with us. Today I must say we are very, very thankful for that."

Knowing that "CWA had our back" made the decade-long campaign bearable, Bilal said. "What it means to be part of a great union, we've gained from your support, brothers and sisters. We knew there would be someone here to help us in this fight, and now we know we can stand up and help some of the other workers at the airline industry."

Bilal said Piedmont agents are now bargaining their first contract, and finally have hope that the "unbelievable" low wages of some workers will improve. "We are looking for fairness for all of the workers, full time and part time," he said. "Now we have a voice, a voice that's speaking very loud."

CWA also presented organizing awards to those 15 local unions who organized at least 100 workers since the last convention: Locals 1040, 1171, 2107, 3010, 3104, 3112, 3122, 3204, 3641, 7500, 7901, 9110, 13000, 13301 and 13500.

**Districts 1, 6 Honored For Top Political Action Fundraising**

In a critical time for raising funds to fight back against attacks on working families, Districts 1 and 6 were honored this week for their members' CWA Political Action contributions, a collective $1.8 million over the past year.

The districts and individual locals were recognized with awards given at the convention Tuesday. Previously known as CWA-COPE, the program is now being called CWA Political Action.

District 1 was honored for raising the most funds, $984,613; for having the most members giving to political action, 15,181; and for having the most members contributing at least $1 or more per week, 11,129.

District 6 won for having the highest percentage of member participation in political fundraising at 20.15 percent; for having the highest percentage of members contributing $1 or more per week at 15.61 percent; and for having the highest per capita contributions per total membership, $14.41 per year.

The local awards went to:
- Local 1101 for having the most members signed up for voluntary contributions, with 2,341 participants. Local 1101 also won for having the most members contributing at least $1 automatically every week, 1,455.

- Local 1301 for having the highest percentage of members contributing, an impressive 93.3 percent.

- Local 6300 for contributing the most dollars at $132,906.