

# The Union Bug

Published for the members of the United Staff Union

**Issue:**

Jan/Feb. 2004

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## Constitutional Changes

Constitutional changes are to be submitted to the President in writing no later than sixty (60) days prior to the annual meeting (this year's annual meeting is May 1, 2004, at Ho Chunk). The USU Board will make a recommendation relative to the changes and all members are to have the proposed changes thirty (30) days prior to the annual meeting. Constitutional changes take a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members present and voting. Bylaw changes are handled in the same fashion as constitutional changes except that bylaw changes take a majority vote of those members present and voting.

Recommendations for USU Policy changes should be sent in writing to Shorty Ott (Associate staff at the Brookfield office and secretary of USU), chair of the Policy Committee.

## Election Procedures

By Sharleen "Shorty" Ott

The procedure we use is what the NSO has directed us to use. The reason for the number is only to make sure nobody votes more than once. Also, it's very important to use that envelope if you want your vote to count. When your envelope with the number on it is received it is checked with the number on the master copy to insure that only one number was received for that person. When all numbered envelopes are received they are opened and the smaller envelope is removed and the numbered envelope is thrown away. The smaller envelope with the ballot in it is saved and opened later to tally the votes. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me.

## Proxy Votes

Because there have been some questions in the past and because the caucuses will be voting on a number of bargaining issues in the near future, we thought it would be advantageous to copy the section of our USU Constitution and bylaws that deal with proxy votes as a reminder to all USU members. Article VIII of the USU bylaws is found below:

### ARTICLE VIII — PROXIES

USU members who have a serious illness or death in the family, or who are on specific work assignments (assignment for which discipline or reprimand might result because of absence from that assignment), or who are on other union (USU or NSO) business are the only members who shall be permitted to vote by proxy. Such authority to cast proxy votes shall be in writing and shall:

1. Only be valid for the meeting in question.
2. Designate a particular USU member from the same caucus who has the authority to cast the proxy.
3. Designate the specific issue(s) on which the proxy may be voted.
4. Designate reason for casting said proxy.

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## **Bargains Flourish Throughout USU-Land**

All five contracts for USU members are either open at this time or the units are preparing to bargain.

### **Associate Staff at the Trust**

The Associate Staff at the Trust is in the midst of the bargain with the following USU members on the bargaining team: Janet Hanson, Deb Lewis, Dave Sundet, Sandy Trapino, Karen Weiss and Al Manson as chief negotiator.

Across the table from them on management's side are: Mike Stoll, Laurie Wegger, Sue Maran, and Marlene Reitmeier as note taker.

### **Associate Staff Trust P&C**

The Associate Staff Trust P&C group has been approached by Russ Denk, manager to open bargaining midterm. The bargaining team for the re-opener will be Lisa Struck and Carrie Yun, assisted by Greg Spring.

### **Trust Professional Staff**

The Trust Professional Staff has named their bargaining team consisting of Eugene Dunk, Sue Laulainen, Mike Zemplinski, and Jim Carlson as chief negotiator.

### **Associate Staff/WEAC**

The Associate Staff/WEAC has set their bargaining team of: Bonnie Breivogel, Shorty Ott, Michelle Plansky, Kathy Spannbauer, Louise Uphoff and Fred Andrist as chief negotiator. Two alternates have also been appointed – Cindy Jensen and Kris Rabideaux-Wade.

The WEAC management team will consist of: Arlene Braden, Michele Brisack, Ed Johnson, Lynette Stansfield, Deborah Woehrer, and Dick Terry as chief negotiator.

### **Professional Staff/WEAC**

The Professional Staff/WEAC has also established their bargaining team except for the SE representative to be determined later. The bargaining team members are: Melissa Cherney, Leroy Roberts, Gerry Roethel, Tim Smith, Greg Spring, Steve Johnson as chief negotiator. The USU president, Anne Boley, is an ex-officio member of the team.

The WEAC management team will be: Scott Clark, Paul Craig, Sherry Crownhart, Robert Fitzsimmons, Deborah Woehrer, and Carol Albright Gobeli as chairperson, and Dick Terry as chief negotiator.

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## **FMLA Memorandum Clarification**

A number of questions came up at the January Professional Staff caucus meeting regarding the Family Medical Leave Memorandum dated November 13, 2003 from Anne Boley, USU President, and Michael Butera, WEAC Executive Director, to WEAC Professional and Associate Staff.

### **Who authorized this memo?**

The Executive Committee met with WEAC management and discussed this.

### **What was the process?**

The memo was presented at a labor/management meeting for review. Melissa Cherney (legal) was asked to review the memo. After some modifications were made, the memo was approved by the USU Executive Committee and the WEAC management and sent out.

Whenever information is sent out as a joint memo with management, the USU Executive Committee is involved. Because we are not all expert in all areas, our USU colleagues who are knowledgeable in the areas are asked to assist.

-- Anne Boley, USU President

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## **WAR College**

The NSO Winter Advocacy Retreat was held January 15-17, 2004 in Sarasota, FL. This year USU had 16 participants attending the WAR College. Each caucus sent three members, (Associate Staff Trust – Pam Born, Lisa Struck, Karen Weiss; Associate Staff WEAC/UniServ– Diane Johnson, Michelle Plansky, Kathy Spannbauer; Professional Staff – Clyde Clauson, Eugene Dunk, Greg Spring) all four officers went this time (officers are allotted one trip during their two year term), and we had three members training – Sandy Tripino from the Trust Associate Staff, Louise Uphoff from the WEAC Associate Staff and Dennis Eisenberg who is on the NSO Pension and Benefits Committee.

NSO President, Chuck Agerstrand, spoke at the WAR College describing us – the National Staff Union (NSO) – as a “union of unionists”. The training sessions offered at Sarasota were designed to promote collectivism so absolutely essential to the well-being of all NSO members.

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## **USU Trust Associate Bargain Stalled; Trust Rejects Interest Arbitration Invite**

The WEA Trust management has declined a USU invitation to use interest arbitration to settle the last few items in the negotiations for a 2003-06 contract. The USU Trust Associate bargaining team made the offer in early January. Another mediated bargaining session has now been set for February 23.

There have been eight face-to-face meetings of the bargaining teams so far. The last one was in November. The remaining issues are retirement contributions and a 3-tier prescription drug card. The parties have both said they would agree to wage raises of 2% in each of the three years of the contract. A number of tentative agreements have also been reached on relatively minor language changes.

The bargain began to lock up over the employer's initial insistence that there be no increase at all in the 20% level of employer contribution to the retirement plan. It is important to know these basic facts:

1. All other Trust employees (all managers, non-union, and USU field reps) get 25% retirement payments.
2. All other Trust employees are paid higher wages than the USU Associates (secretarial/clerical).
3. The USU has been negotiating slow but steady increases in the retirement level for the Trust Associates since the first contract nearly 30 years ago, starting at 1/2%.
4. All other USU members (WEAC and UniServs--associates and professionals) have 25% retirement payments.

The Trust has been using two arguments to support its position that there will be no increase in the 20% retirement level. It is not surprising that the two do not match. The first line of reasoning offered by the Trust for keeping the lowest paid employees at a lower percentage for retirement is: The lowest paid employees are used to living on lower wages, and, with social security and the current 20% plan, these employees will be more able to live on their pensions than the higher paid employees will on their social security and 25% plan. The second line is: The costs of insurance went up so much in the last three years that the 20% retirement payment level needs to remain unchanged for three years.

The USU has offered to settle for a 1/2% increase in retirement in each year (to get up to 21 and 1/2%), along with the 2% wage rate increases. While this slows the movement towards the maximum (by IRS rules) 25% level, it does maintain some movement. During the last three year contract, the USU Trust Associate retirement level increased from 17% to 20%. Not too many bargains ago, a vocal Trust manager was very outspoken in proclaiming that the USU Trust Associates would never, ever get to a 17% retirement level.

The other unsettled issue is the prescription drug card. The current benefit is a 0/5 card. The USU has offered to go to a 3-tier 0/5/20 card as part of a total settlement. The Trust is insisting on a 3-tier 5/10/25 card. The Trust says that all other Trust employees have that 3-tier card, and the Associates should have it too. The USU agrees that the Associates should have the same 3-tier card as all the others just as soon as the Associates have the same retirement level as all the others.

At the last bargaining session in November, federal mediator Mary Hosford managed to get the employer to offer some retirement improvement. But it was to be financed by taking money away from the 2% wage rate increases. And it carried the higher deductible 3-tier card. The USU Trust Associate caucus rejected that proposal.

The USU offered to use interest arbitration to settle the contract. The Trust has declined the offer, stating

that if it had known it was going to be using interest arbitration, it would have used different bargaining tactics. The USU Associates find this reasoning flawed, for the ultimate question in interest arbitration is not "How did you get to this point in the bargain?" but rather "Which final offer is more reasonable?"

The bargaining session on February 23 will provide important news to all USU members. If there is a settlement, or even some encouraging progress toward a completed agreement, it will be welcome news for all. But if the Trust displays no significant flexibility on the remaining issues of retirement and a 3-tier drug card, then it is likely that the 200 USU Trust Associates will ask for active support from all. And active support at this time means devising and using methods of putting pressure on the Trust management--from the inside and the outside--from USU activists and rank and file members at the Trust headquarters, and in the WEAC and UniServ offices.

— Al Manson

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# Solidarity Forever

Solidarity Forever was written in 1915 by Ralph Chaplin, organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a militant singing union known to all as the Wobblies. Since then it has achieved the status of unofficial anthem of the labor movement.

It was composed by Chaplin on January 17, 1915. That day, while lying on the rug in his living room, he scribbled stanza after stanza. The idea had come to him earlier while he was in West Virginia helping the coal miners in the great Kanawha Valley strike. The version below includes all the stanzas traditionally sung, together with a few more recent additions. It is traditional for union meeting to end with the members standing, holding hands, and singing:

## **Solidarity Forever (sung to the tune of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”)**

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,

There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun.

Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one?

But the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever!*

*Solidarity forever!*

*Solidarity forever!*

*For the union makes us strong.*

Have we anything in common with the greedy parasite,

Who would lash us into bondage, who would crush us with his

might -

Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?

For the Union makes us strong!

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

It is we who ploughed the prairies; built the cities where they

trade;

Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of

railroad laid.

Now we stand outcast and starving 'midst the wonders we

have made.

But the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours

alone.

We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by

stone.

It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.

For the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,

But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel would

turn.

We can break their brutal power, gain our freedom when we

learn

That the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold.

Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousand fold.

We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old,

For the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever! . .*

We're the women of the union and we sure know how to fight.

We'll fight for women's issues and we'll fight for women's

rights.

A woman's work is never done from morning until night.

Women make the union strong!

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

It is we who wash dishes, scrub the floors and clean the dirt,

Feed the kids and send them off to school - and then we go to

work,

Where we work for half men's wages for a boss who likes to

flirt.

But the union makes us strong!

*Solidarity forever! . . .*

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