

RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum's Speech to the 21st RWDSU Convention (8/2/10)

Sisters and brothers nothing has ever made me prouder than being part of the RWDSU. Nothing has ever made me prouder than working with all of you, with all the men and women of this union. You are my friends. You are my family. You are my brothers and sisters.

I thank you for your commitment, your courage, your vision and your energy in making this union such an incredible expression of the aspirations of working people. Each of us has a right to cherish what we have built.

Each of us has a right to be proud of our union – the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, UFCW.

The theme of this convention is Standing Up for Working People. And that is what we do each and every day. We have never been a union of passive observers. We are a union of activists - a union ready and willing to stand up and take on the challenges of the day. We are a union that is fearless in the face of injustice, a union that is driven by the most basic of convictions -that working people deserve to be treated with fairness and dignity. That's what the RWDSU is all about. It's who we are. And it is as true in 2010 as it was in 1937 – some 73 years ago when we were founded - and that will never change.

And our conviction and commitment has never been more necessary than it is today.

We all read the news and we are confronted by deeply disquieting images. We read how elected officials propose that homeless people be charged rent to stay in homeless shelters, we know how people are caught in the vice grip of unemployment and underemployment. Friends, families and neighbors worry if they will keep their jobs and their homes, how their families will survive following the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes.

And next to those reports we read how CEO pay is on the rise. Just last year Wells Fargo's CEO John Stumpf was the highest paid of any financial industry executive in 2009. He received \$21.3 million in 2009 total compensation, \$6.5 million more than he received in 2007 before the financial crisis had even unfolded. Wells Fargo received \$25 billion in TARP money, taxpayer money, to keep them from going under. And that's where Stumpf's money came from – TARP money.

But what is truly amazing is that Stumpf is not the exception. Banks and brokerage houses came hat in hand and took our money to fix a mess they created. And as soon as the dust settled the executives in these companies couldn't get their snouts back in the trough fast enough. It's hard to believe that anyone would be so transparently and disgustingly greedy. But that's exactly what's happening.

Brothers and sisters we are experiencing the greatest redistribution of wealth that we have ever seen. But it is flowing in a tragic direction - from working people and those who have very

little to the wealthiest members of our society. That giant sucking sound is back. But this time it is amplified by the wholesale siphoning of workers paychecks to feed the never ending greed of the moneyed few.

And Republican leaders are even calling for even lower tax rates for the wealthiest.

Outrageous Wall Street bonuses are back. CEO salaries are hitting new heights. Those who already have so much want more and more - and those with little are being asked to cut back, make sacrifices and do with even less.

How can we not be outraged?

It's no wonder that people are angry. And we should be angry.

We, in this union, are feeling it firsthand ourselves.

Over a thousand miles away in Williamson, New York. 300 members of the RWDSU have been forced out on strike when their employer, Mott's, a part of the larger Dr Pepper Snapple Group – cut wages by \$1.50 an hour for each and every employee. And that wasn't all.

The company announced it was eliminating the pension, raising the cost of medical coverage and cutting the 401k match. And in their own words, when asked why they were doing this, they said “because the workers make too much.” They make too much?

Now you would think that Dr Pepper Snapple and Mott's were on hard times. That they were trying to cut wages to boost a sagging bottom line. Well brothers and sisters you would be wrong. This company has never been so profitable. Last year alone they made \$555 million in net profit – a record for them. When their earnings report came out at the end of February, their stock skyrocketed 28 percent. They are leading their industry. At Dr Pepper Snapple, things have never been better. They are so good that over the last three years the CEO, Larry Young's compensation was increased by 113 percent to a whopping \$6.5 million. Executives have received bonuses and increases. But it's not enough, they want more. The company wants to cut the pay of their workers – some of whom have been there for more than 40 years and have made the company profitable. And the company is doing it not because they have to, but simply because they think they can get away with it because of the high unemployment in the area.

Brothers and sisters, Michael LeBerth, the president of Local 220 is here today, as well as other Motts strikers – and I would like to ask all of those from Local 220 to stand and be recognized by this convention. We will stand shoulder to shoulder with you in this fight.

But, brothers and sisters, that kind of attack on working people is not limited to Motts and upstate New York. In Alabama hundreds of RWDSU members lost their jobs when the Wells Fargo-Wachovia bank stopped providing capital for their employer Meadowcraft. Meadowcraft was a profitable employer, a maker of wrought iron furniture. An increasingly rare example of American manufacturing making it despite competition from China. But Wells Fargo Wachovia

didn't care. They pulled the financial rug out from underneath Meadowcraft despite the fact that the bank was receiving millions of dollars in bailout money, tax money – your money – in order to keep money flowing to businesses like Meadowcraft.

And in Ontario over 100 RWDSU members were turned out by Loblaw's National Grocers when the company decided to shut its warehouse facility. And if that wasn't bad enough, the company – despite what had always been the practice in the past - only wanted to do the barest minimum to help the people they forced into the ranks of the unemployed – even though they had no problem finding money to pay managers an enhanced severance that they denied to our members. When it came to workers, the message was “we couldn't care less.”

Brothers and sisters we are on the front lines of the battle against corporate greed. It is the battle to determine what sort of society we want for ourselves and our families.

The challenges we face are real. The stakes are high. And at times the odds may seem stacked against us.

But brothers and sisters let me tell you this. The RWDSU is not backing down, we are not giving up, we are not going away. We in the RWDSU are standing up and fighting back and we are making a real difference.

When this union took on New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg over the development of the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, people said we were crazy to take on the mayor of the city – the most powerful man and the wealthiest man in New York as well as taking on the most powerful developer in the city, the Related Companies.

But we were waging a fight for what we knew was right. Related stood to make huge profits.

But Related and Mayor Bloomberg couldn't have cared less that what was being built would only provide dead-end, poverty wage jobs for people and institutionalize poverty in the Bronx. And those new lousy jobs would likely replace good union jobs in the area, jobs held by members of RWDSU Local 338. To make matters worse Related was getting million of dollars of public money, taxpayer money, to build this mall.

So we joined hands with the community, faith leaders and elected officials in the city and we said that if the development wasn't done the right way, it shouldn't be done at all. If public resources were being used to benefit private development, then the public had the right to expect something in return. And for us that meant good jobs – jobs that provided living wages, rather than jobs that condemned people to lives of poverty.

And brothers and sisters an amazing thing happened. We stood and we drew a line in the sand – or seeing that it was the Bronx we drew a line in the cement. We made our arguments to the public and to city council members – and we won.

We beat the Mayor.

We beat Related and we won a victory for working people by saying these are our communities and we have a right to see that what is built benefits the people who live there.

But this campaign wasn't just about stopping something. It was about giving birth to something. We were establishing an important principle. And out of the Kingsbridge campaign we launched our efforts at winning a Living Wage law for all of New York City that would raise the pay and benefits for all retail workers employed at developments that were supported by taxpayer money.

And, brothers and sisters, that makes sense not just in New York, but in every city where the RWDSU represents working men and women.

Again and again, we are up against unparalleled corporate greed. This is the defining battle of our times. We are standing our ground, we are fighting back – and we are winning more often than we have lost.

During the Bush years we weren't satisfied with simply surviving the most anti-worker, anti-union decade in our nation's history; we stood up, we spoke truth to power, and we helped our movement change the course of history.

Your strength, your courage, your determination has been a light to working families throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Yes, there may be times when the damage done during the years of George Bush's callous indifference to the welfare of working people may seem irreparable. And in Canada, Stephen Harper, has continued a similar rampage by trying to defund education and health care, minimize unions, and maximize NAFTA. But as we shake off these trying times I believe we have seen glimmers of hope and I know that if we stand united that we will succeed in turning this mess around.

Our struggle on behalf of working families is perpetual and relentless.

You don't have to tell our members who pluck and process chickens in Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas and Tennessee or even Illinois that workers' wages have been slow to rise while CEO compensation has risen to more than 400 times what an average worker makes, that workers' health and their very lives are of less importance to their employers than the quest for ever higher profits.

They realize it every morning as they plunge their hands into the blood and guts and deathly equipment of one of the most primitive industries in America.

You don't have to remind our members who work in retail that their jobs continue to be on the line because of a lack of consumer confidence and spending.

We feel it every day as our prestigious employers stoop to undermining our contracts, turn ever tighter the screws of productivity, and try to steal overtime wages.

Ask our food processing and manufacturing members who've spent their entire careers putting productivity, profitability and dependability into the most highly-regarded brands in our country.

They already knew the likes of Post and Welch's and Del Monte and Quaker and Pepsi and Coca-Cola all too often cared more about their brand names than the people who made those brands so profitable.

But corporate greed is nothing new – what is new is the extent of it. From the earliest moments of our union, our locals and our leaders and our members have had to dig with their hands in the hardscrabble soil of unbridled capitalism.

Our founders were workers who were often ignored — too many different colors and countries ....too many languages.... too many women ..... too many low-paid workers.

But those low-paid workers, many of them recent immigrants, fought back against disrespect, degradation, and discrimination.

They took inspiration from President Franklin Roosevelt, when he said: “ Every man has a right to life. That means he also has a right to make a comfortable living. No business which depends for its existence on paying less than living wages to its workers has any right to continue in this country.”

They put their jobs on the line, formed this union, and carved out the rules we still live by today --- never back down from a fight; stand together in the face of greed and uncompromising power.

Since our last convention, our local unions and councils have negotiated hundreds and hundreds of new contracts, even as our employers were determined to profiteer off our weakened economy. At times, their demands for concessions were unthinkable, especially when it came to health care benefits.

But our locals never shied from fighting for the interests of members.

In the South, where right-to-work-for less laws make every contract an extra difficult battle for our Southeast and Alabama and Midsouth Councils, our new members at Alatrade Foods in Phenix City, Alabama negotiated a substantial first agreement.

And those 2,500 fighting poultry workers at Equity Poultry in Camilla, Georgia added another chapter to their proud history — they forced the company to increase its pension contribution and raise wages. And at Tysons in Buena Vista, GA and at Petit Jean in Arkadelphia, Arkansas and for thousands of other poultry workers across the south, members fought for and won better wages and benefits, protected their health care and made it clear that the RWDSU had the muscle necessary to stand up and fight and win strong new contracts.

In a stirring example of what the RWDSU is really all about , we got behind our members at Tyson's in Shelbyville, Tennessee, and stood up for human rights, and dignity at work.

Many workers at that poultry plant were from Somalia and they were Muslim – and they wanted the right to celebrate their religious faith. And we negotiated that the end of Ramadan, Eid al Fitr – a very important Muslim religious day – be a paid holiday in their contract.

Be when we did that, we became the target of the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and the whole hate-filled crowd at Fox News. My picture even ended up on a neo-Nazi website.

But this union stood its ground.

The RWDSU was the first union in the nation to win Dr Martin Luther King's birthday as a paid holiday and we are proud that in Shelbyville, we became the first union in the United States to win Eid al Fitr as a paid holiday for the members of our union.

We were criticized for Dr. King's holiday then by the racists and the haters, and we were attacked again for Eid al Fitr again by the same bunch. But this union, the RWDSU, will never back away from what is right, for standing up for members' religious freedoms, for fighting for tolerance and dignity and decency for each and every worker. It's what we do and we're not about to change!

I had the privilege of going down to the first Eid-al Fitr celebration that fell under the new contract. It was an amazing celebration. American born and those born in Somalia and other nations were there. Christians and Muslims alike came together. Different people, different faiths, different languages. But all celebrating together. Because this union understands something: Justice is indivisible. You cannot be for justice for some and not for all. Time and again RWDSU members have been there for each other. When flood waters rose in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, destroying people's homes and literally washing away whole communities, RWDSU members came to the aid of their brothers and sisters.

Local 110 organized rescue crews and sent teams to other members' homes to help save whatever property they could.



When Corporal Bill Kerr returned to Sudbury from serving his country in Afghanistan, his body was shattered, his future very much in doubt. Corporal Kerr had both legs and his arm blown off by a mine. He was the most grievously wounded soldier to survive his injuries in Canadian military history. Some said there was no hope, that he would not live. But the RWDSU Northern Joint Council didn't give up hope. The union sprung into action, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a new home for Corporal Kerr and his family and to make sure that he could live in dignity.

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We must always be there for one another. Whether at work or at home, we prop each other up, give each other strength and help each other overcome the challenges that we face.

When management at Sudbury Downs tried to undermine seniority and raise health care costs we locked arms and looked them in the eye and said No! We hit the streets and struck them hard and we won a new agreement. In New York, that same spirit was with the 2,000 members of Local 3 when we took on Bloomingdale's to fend off company attacks on the contract. We rallied and we marched and we spoke out. And the members of Local 3 got a new contract. And Local 338, in a fight that lasted 19 long months, beat back A&P's efforts to take away pensions from members who work as pharmacists.

In New Jersey, Local 108 won wage increases and protected health care in contract after contract, and waged a valiant fight to protect our members when bankruptcy overtook Strauss

Auto.

In the Midwest and the Northeast, the record of contract settlements with pay increases and protection of health care reads like a Who's Who of the Fortune 500:

Local 224 at Hasboro/Milton Bradley in Massachusetts ....

Local 835 at Coca-Cola in Fort Wayne, Indiana ....

Local 578 at Del Monte Foods in Illinois ....

Local 110 at Quaker Oats/Pepsi in Cedar Rapids ....

Local 705 ... H.J. Heinz in Michigan .....

Local 513 ... Pepsi Bottling in Merrimack, Massachusetts .....

Local 368 ...Yoplait USA in Reed City, Michigan .....

Local 184-L ... Kellogg's Snack Division in Kansas City, Kansas ....

Local 374 at Post Cereal in Battle Creek ....

That's impressive, but it's not half the story because despite the worst economic storm since the Great Depression — we won wage increases, protected our health care benefits, and strengthened our pensions in contract after contract.

But we know the fight is far from over. Nothing makes it clearer than what is happening at Mott's.

Those brothers and sisters must have been listening to the music of James Brown, the

Godfather of Soul and the labor poet of rock and roll, as he sang:

“We’re tired of beating our head against the wall and working for someone else. We’re people, we’re just like the birds and the bees, we’d rather die on our feet, than be living on our knees.”

We’re with you, Mott’s and Local 220. Just like you, we never go to our knees, because we’re a standup union — we stand up for equality, we stand up for justice, we stand up for our families, and we stand up for each other. We stand up for working families.

And today I have a message for Larry Young, the CEO of Dr Pepper Snapple:

We will be there One Day Longer, One Day Stronger. You and Dr Pepper Snapple have become the poster children for corporate greed in North America - and we will not tolerate that.

But brothers and sisters, we also know that if we are going to have the power to negotiate good contracts we need to build a larger union, a larger labor movement. Whether in Canada or the United States, we have to organize. In the United States, only 7 percent of private sector workers belong to a union. If we do not grow, we will not survive.

And that’s why I’m especially pleased to commend our locals and councils who overcame the odds and managed to organize new members and win first contracts.

Our hats are off to our Northern Joint Council for the Price Chopper supermarket and the Super 8 hotel in Ontario, for their campaign to bring volunteer firefighter units across Ontario

into our union. ...

To Local 338 for building the union at Duane Reade and at kosher markets in New York City.

To our Alabama and MidSouth Council for those 500 poultry workers at Alatrade Poultry  
.....

Local 108 for Academy Bus Company ....

Local 110 for Coles Quality Food ...

And to Local 1102 for extraordinary wins for 1,000 new members in the H&M chain and 1,400 members at Filenes Basement.

But brothers and sisters, and I think you'll agree, that's not enough — not for our members and their families, not for the unorganized workers who are depending on us here and in Canada .....

..... and certainly it's not enough for all of us who believe with our hearts and minds that strong unions are the only hope for restoring our economies in both countries and rebuilding our middle class — it's just not good enough!

I think we all saw the problems we were facing, even before our last convention.

We'd seen seven international unions, including the UFCW, leave the AFL-CIO because they believed the Federation was doing too little in organizing; that if we didn't change our approach we would continue to grow weaker. They were right in that if the American labor movement did not jolt itself out of complacency we might disappear forever.

Most of us believed we all needed to do more in politics as well as in organizing. But I feel we must continue to find ways to work more closely together and I hope that we can find a way to reestablish one united labor federation in the United States .

So call it what you will, and build it as you must, but let's find a way we can all work together. With the obstacles we face we have no choice but to seek solidarity throughout the North American and the global labor movements.

Since our last convention, we in the RWDSU have done our share of the work needed to grow a stronger labor movement and make it work for all working families.

We helped change the political atmosphere in Washington, DC. And while the last year and half have been frustrating in many ways when it comes to our legislative priorities, we are once again on the offensive. We are no longer just fighting back against the attacks of our enemies. We are fighting to pass good laws, like financial reform and health care reform.

Are we always successful? Of course not. But what a difference an election cycle can make.

And we will continue to press for laws that protect our rights as union members, that give workers a fair shot at organizing, that allows immigrants to live in peace and dignity. Because it is high time that our immigration laws reflect the reality that immigrant workers deserve to be treated fairly; that families should not be split by borders; that only bad things can come from a society that is bifurcated along the lines of “legal” and illegal.”

For far too long immigration status has been used by employers as an invitation to exploitation; a way to take advantage of people who had no real protection under the law. And now that kind of abuse is being enshrined into law in places like Arizona where even the suspicion of being undocumented is reason enough to be stopped and frisked, to be subjected to possible detainment and arrest.

Brothers and sisters we are better than that.

Our freedoms should be of higher value than to be so easily discarded for political expediency. We need to reform U.S. immigration law and we need to do it now.

In Canada, we rekindled our efforts to bring down the cruel, conservative government of Steven Harper and rallied behind the Canadian Labour Congress agenda, which calls for raising the minimum wage, stabilizing energy costs and requiring public institutions to buy Canadian.

In 2008, voter turnout for the Canadian parliamentary elections was the lowest in history and Harper retained his office and was able to put together another conservative coalition.

But we have another chance in 2012, if not sooner, and the RWDSU will be in the front lines of the struggle.

In New York, we raised our Retail Action Project to a new level, determined to enlist community organizations, churches, non-profits, elected officials, human rights and student groups behind our efforts.

Our strategy is to help these natural allies reach their goals so they will help us reach our goal of building a stronger floor under wages and benefits for our members by raising them for all workers in the city.

Together, we're standing in solidarity with non-union retail workers, and we're fighting for public policy decisions that move Greater New York towards a high-wage, full-benefit economy.

When we went to bat for current and former employees of the Yellow Rat Bastard – an appropriate name for a clothing store chain where management acted like rats...and bastards - people wondered why we were taking on a fight for non-union workers.

We partnered with Attorney General Andrew Cuomo as his office filed a suit that won \$1.4 million dollars in back wages. The fight really heated up and got nasty. But when the AG's office had the owner arrested, we knew the campaign was turning our way.

And I am proud to say that what started out as a fight to get workers back pay resulted in an organizing campaign - and today those workers get better pay, benefits and treatment because of the contract they won. They are members of the RWDSU. It is proof that zero tolerance for corporate lawlessness is not only good public policy, it's a good organizing strategy.

And we've been ratcheting up our political involvement too.

When the U.S. political primary season for President began in 2007, we knew it was time for our union to begin building new political power. We get involved in politics not because we want to, but because we have to. We know that so much that affects us as working people is determined by the political process.

And so we decided to back candidates in many different states and to play the largest role

we have ever played in winning back the White House for working people.

We knocked on more doors, made more phone calls, registered more voters and worked more hours than ever before. RWDSU members left their homes for weeks at a time to devote to the campaign. We sent more delegates to the Democratic National Convention than we ever had in our history. And I even had the honor of casting a vote for Barack Obama in the Electoral College on behalf of our union.

The RWDSU helped carry many states for Barack Obama, and on election night there was no confusion over vote counts, no question about the outcome, no destructive role for the U.S. Supreme Court to play.

We had elected not only the first African American president in our history, but possibly the most outspoken champion of working families in our lifetimes. And we are proud of the role we played in the general election in 2008.

We created an army of RWDSU grassroots political warriors that continues to grow and is leading the labor movement in taking on the new right, the old right and the not quite-so-right.

Makes no difference to us, we're ready to tear up the grassroots no matter who's the opponent --- the Grand Old Party, the Tea Party, the Tory Party, the Conservative Party, or a Sarah Palin hunting party, bring 'em on.

When President Barack Obama asked for the help of the labor movement in passing his economic stimulus plan, we cranked up our telephones and e-mails and together we stopped the economy from sliding into an even worse Depression.

When he asked for our help in the end game over national health care reform, we gave it to him unselfishly— we didn't get single payer, or even a public option, but together we brought about the most significant change in health care in decades. Is it perfect? No.

But we will continue to work with the Administration to address its shortcomings and bring real health security to all working people.

Brothers and sisters, having President Obama in office has been important for every working family and every union in this country, and we shouldn't forget it.

He's worked under the radar to strengthen the Department of Labor and today we're seeing new and expanded enforcement of wage and hour laws, and health and safety regulation.

His nominees for the Supreme Court, Justice Sotomayor and now Elena Kagan, stand in stark contrast to the conservative ideologues put forward under George Bush.

And today the National Labor Relations Board and the National Mediation Board are

restoring the labor laws that George W. Bush tried to destroy.

President Barack Obama responded to labor's campaign to bring Wall Street under control with tough new regulations governing banks and other financial institutions.

Now he needs the help of our entire labor movement to deal with the Gulf Coast tragedy, to pass more legislation to preserve and create jobs, to push an economic recovery, and to win the Congressional elections in November.

We cannot afford to lose the US House and Senate.

We may not have gotten everything we wanted from this Congress and this President, but imagine the alternative if we are fighting against a Republican Congress that is hell bent on attacking working people and destroying the labor movement. And that means we have to mobilize this fall.

We must register our members, we must increase our contributions, we have to walk the precincts and run the phone banks, and we have to get out the vote unlike we have ever done before. And most importantly we have to explain what is at stake.

As we gather here in Orlando this week for our convention, we are told there is some good economic news for some. Corporate profits are up. CEO pay is up. They are even hiring on Wall Street again.

But while the economies in the United States and Canada are supposedly recovering for some and clearly generating lots of money for the wealthy and the big corporations, workers like our members are still trapped in what is really for far too many of them – not a recession, but a depression.

Wages are still stagnant, even though productivity is up. Unemployment is still nearly 10 percent in the United States and in Canada, despite claims of employment gains, there are as many unemployed today as there were over a year ago.

We're still not even creating the 150,000 jobs a month it takes to keep up with the growth in the labor supply in the United States. Mortgage foreclosures are still rampant. Worker's credit cards are still loaded.

While one segment of our society has too much money, working families have way too little money.

Our wage and wealth gap in the United States is the widest of any industrialized nation, and our members feel it every day. And it is not much better in Canada.

One of our members said to me not long ago, "What has happened to our jobs? We all worry about the future. Why are we being asked to sacrifice while the wealthy continue on in the

same way?”

And the only answer is this. Thank goodness we have our union. Thank goodness we have each other. If not, can you imagine what things would be like?

Because it's only with our union, with our labor movement, we are able to stand up and say no to these greedy bastards.

But working people still need real change. And to achieve that, we have to have far more strength and power than we have today.

We have to organize more new members, because more members bring the strength we need to stand up at the bargaining table.... and we need to start now, with or without the Employee Free Choice Act.

That means every local and every council must invest more time, money and staff in organizing, and I pledge to you that the RWDSU will do its part.

Recently we launched a new organizing project - the Midwest Organizing Project – that brings together local union resources along with support from the RWDSU to jumpstart our organizing efforts throughout the Midwest.

Several new campaigns are already underway and we hope to build on our successes.

We must be creative in our approaches and use every tool at our disposal. 1,000 H&M workers became members of Local 1102 through tough on the ground organizing it's true.

But the campaign got a vital head start when we secured an agreement from the Swedish-owned company that put some parameters on how the company could fight our efforts. That only happened because of the relationships we and the UFCW have with the global trade union movement.

And in New York City, we've already begun a new Living Wage Campaign aimed at convincing the city council to pass a comprehensive ordinance requiring all retail businesses to pay a living wage with decent benefits.

We'll be working to lift the wage and benefit floor for all retail workers in New York. And through our Retail Action Project we are exploring the idea of recruiting and activating workers who don't yet belong to our union into an association that can assist our efforts.

It's a strategy we hope will be picked up and multiplied throughout the labor movement.

To be successful we have to speak up not just for our members but for all workers in our jurisdictions.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once wrote a wonderful book called, “It Takes A Village to Raise a Child.”

We think it takes an entire community to stand up for workers and their families, and we are determined to be the union that takes the lead and makes it work — forming alliances, working with community partners and religious leaders and leveraging our political muscle.

Brothers and sisters, we need a stronger labor movement standing up for working families, and a stronger labor movement isn’t possible without stronger unions like the RWDSU. We are determined to show our brothers and sisters the way whether in the U.S. or Canada, whether at Loblaw’s or at Motts, or anywhere the men and women of this union live and work.

It has to start somewhere, and that needs to be with all of us in this room.

Are we up to the task?

Robert F. Kennedy warned us that the future does not belong to those who are content with today.

It belongs, I think, to those of us, to all of you, to our locals and councils and boards who are willing to stand up for workers – it belongs to people like our members who fight day after

day and year after year to build better lives for their families .

Winston Churchill said, “never give in, never give in, never; never; never; - in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

And Mahatma Gandhi gave us the insight we need to get the job done, when he said, “Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from indomitable will.”

Brothers and sisters we in the RWDSU have that will.

We must be willing to say no to the status quo, to stand up for a better future, to stand up for progressive political change, stand up for civil rights and human rights, and stand up for economic and social justice, and not just today, but every day. Brothers and sisters - together, united – we in the RWDSU must stand up for working people!