

Photo by Leslie Stodart



Lynn Williams Honored Twice by Canada

Two good things happened this spring to Lynn Williams, the retired International President of the United Steelworkers and current president of SOAR, the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees.

Williams, 82, was invested in May as an Officer of the Order of Canada, the country's highest civilian honor, in recognition of a lifetime of achievement in the labor movement.

Created in 1967, the Order was established to recognize the exemplary lifetime contributions made by Canadians to Canada and to humanity at large. Its motto is "Desiderantes meliorem patriam," which means, "Desiring a better country."

Lynn Williams Street

Three days after the investiture, on May 7, the city of Toronto named a street after Williams in a former factory district where he had his first job as a Steelworker.

Within sight of Toronto's famed CN Tower, Lynn Williams Street is an area known as Liberty Village. It is near the site of the former John Inglis Co., a USW-organized appliance factory, where he joined the union.

"I'm quite surprised, but very pleased," Williams said of the two awards. "I look at them as recognition of the importance of unions."

Williams grew up in Ontario during the Great Depression in a socially-conscious family. Not long after starting to work at Inglis, he was recruited by the Canadian Congress of Labour to organize department store workers.

In 1956, Williams was hired by Larry Sefton, then director of USW District 6. He organized new members on the Niagara Peninsula and led major negotiations in the nickel and other nonferrous industries in Canada.

Fifth USW President

Williams was elected Director of District 6 in 1973 and USW International Secretary in 1977. He became the union's fifth International President in 1983 by a vote of the International Executive Board on the death of his predecessor, Lloyd McBride.

He led the union from 1983 to 1994 — turbulent economic times when the steel industry was confronting unfairly priced imported products and undergoing massive changes that destroyed tens of thousands of jobs.

Gerard Urges Congress to Regulate Private Equity

International President Leo W. Gerard is calling for congressional action to deal with the growing problem of unregulated private equity, pools of private capital used for investments.

Gerard made the case for such intervention in a keynote speech he gave in May at the Harvard Labor and Worklife conference on Managing Labor's Capital.

"The USW wants to avoid another pension fund meltdown," he said.

Further oversight is needed because more private equity firms are becoming employers, creating insecurity among workers, and because such deals are contributing to the growing gap between the very rich and everyone else.

Values at stake

"What's at stake are the values that govern democratic societies, because the greatest risk being caused by private equity is the danger that it is deepening the societal divide being caused by globalization," Gerard said.

Private equity and hedge funds are fueling an unprecedented rate of mergers and acquisitions. Nine of the 10 largest buyouts in history have occurred in the last 18 months, including deals worth \$1.2 trillion total in the first quarter of 2007 alone.

Often these private equity ventures quickly flip the company back to the public market, usually with jobs being cut in the process.

The USW is not opposed to leveraged buyouts and private equity when it's used in the right way for the right purpose, Gerard said, adding that the union has been in the forefront of saving jobs and revitalizing industries by using leveraged buyouts and private equity.



Photo by Gail Oskin



Federal Plant Security Rules Inadequate

New U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rules on chemical plant security fail to protect workers and communities, lack a timetable for changes and do not require industry to take specific measures.

"This is another example of the Bush administration's attempt to appear as if it is taking care of industrial safety problems. Security actions alone are insufficient to protect workers and communities," said International President Leo W. Gerard.

Numerous faults

Though workers are in a position to identify and prevent potential security threats — they understand where an intruder might enter a plant or whether backup control systems are operating properly, for example — DHS did not require employee involvement in making a facility safe.

Under the DHS rules issued in April, whistleblowers are not offered protection. There are no requirements that companies use inherently safer technologies or less hazardous chemicals, and more stringent existing and proposed laws are preempted.

Ron Marino, president of Local 5032, works at Neville Chemical Co. near Pittsburgh and said his plant's security training mostly focuses on being aware of any unusual happenings and reporting them, rather than having security and evacuation drills.

"Our complaint has been that the company has not given us enough involvement in plant security," he said. "It only does what is required by law."

Lax security exposed

After being exposed on the TV show *60 Minutes* for lax plant security, Neville sought a less hazardous substitute for the chemical, boron trifluoride.

Marino said Neville is using the DHS regulations against workers. Cameras are focused constantly on employees and the union is battling the company over using a camera instead of a worker to watch barges. He said the company is treating the employees as more of a security risk than contractors and other outsiders.

Required background checks under the DHS regulation have the potential for employer misuse, and our union views this as an attempt by companies to control workers and violate privacy rights.

Bipartisan attempts were made to pass legislation prohibiting the federal government from pre-empting more stringent state laws. But negotiations between the White House and a conference committee knocked out this provision from an appropriations act.

Acid Maker Enters into Company-wide Pollution Pact

Acid manufacturer and USW employer Rhodia Inc. will pay a \$2 million penalty and spend approximately \$50 million on air pollution controls to resolve allegations that it violated the Clean Air Act.

Pollution controls will decrease actual emissions at some of the company's facilities by more than 90 percent.

Rhodia is the first sulfuric acid manufacturer in the nation to enter into a "company-wide" compliance agreement. It will meet lower emission limits at eight union and non-union plants located in California, Indiana, Louisiana and Texas. Rhodia employs USW members in Houston, Blue Island and Chicago, Ill.; Baltimore, Md.; Charleston, S.C.; Hammond, Ind. and Long Beach, Calif.

The acid is produced by burning sulfur-containing compounds, creating sulfur dioxide. The sulfur dioxide is then converted to sulfur trioxide, which combines with water to form sulfuric acid. Air pollution occurs when unconverted sulfur dioxide and sulfuric acid mist are released into the atmosphere.

The Environmental Protection Agency claims the settlement will reduce harmful air pollution by 19,000 tons per year and improve the air quality for millions of people around the nation. Sulfur dioxide can impair breathing, aggravate respiratory diseases such as bronchitis and cause acid rain.

The government's complaint alleges Rhodia made modifications to its plants that increased emissions of sulfur dioxide without first obtaining preconstruction permits and installing required pollution controls.

The Justice Department and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) expect to reach similar agreements with other sulfuric acid manufacturers.