

The unions will explore how technology can be used to facilitate communications between Pittsburgh, London and other locales.

"How we use technology will be an important part of our ability to build a trans-Atlantic global union," Gerard said.

The agreement also calls for a regular exchange between senior officers every quarter to monitor and develop joint work, to find ways to integrate common programs and enhance the understanding and culture of the unions.

During the exploration process, which is expected to take a year, the unions will engage in coordinated bargaining with common employers and common approaches to collective bargaining with multinational unions.

Solidarity fund

The potential partners have also agreed to establish a "substantial" jointly-administered fund that will be used for conducting international solidarity projects beyond the unions' traditional geographic borders.

"If we don't raise the standard of living in the developing world, they will be used as cannon fodder against us," Gerard said in discussing the fund. "They will be destroyed as we will be."

Projects might include, but are not limited to, the joint exploration of transnational corporations in China and support of the trade union movement in Columbia, where there have been continued attacks on labor and human rights. Also under consideration are capacity-building projects with partner unions in Africa and solidarity work with ship breakers of India.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney praised the proposed alliance as a "bold and innovative approach" toward addressing the effects of globalization on workers and their communities.

"These unions clearly understand that workers' organizations must forge new paths to ensure that all working people can earn decent wages, provide for themselves and their families, and work under safe, healthy conditions," Sweeney said.

The text of the Ottawa accord can be accessed from the USW homepage, <http://www.usw.org>.

www.usw.org



Photo by Unite

Workers in U.S. and Britain Face Similar Challenges

Graham Goddard, deputy general secretary of Amicus, and Amicus International Officer Ben Richards attended the USW Rapid Response conference in Washington, D.C. to borrow ideas and meet some of the USW's most active members.

"What we've learned is that across the Atlantic, the problems that we face in Great Britain and the problems that workers face in America are very similar — wages, manufacturing job losses, pension issues, health and safety issues, recognition at companies for union membership — people getting sacked for trying to organize — all the things that we face on a daily basis is exactly the same position for the union over here and the workers they represent," Goddard said.

Their attendance at the April conference was an example of how the unions can learn from each other's best practices, Goddard said. International President Leo W. Gerard plans to attend an Amicus conference in London this summer.

Goddard called the possibility of a merger exciting because it would mean a more powerful way "to defend pensions, wages, jobs — everything that you get involved in the union for." The possibilities are endless, he said.

"Bringing people together across the continents has got to be a good thing," Goddard said. "Management does it. Globalized companies do it. And now unions are starting to do it, and that's got to be good for working people."

Cross Border Strategy

Mergers and International Cooperation: Part of Our History

Mergers, diversity and international cooperation aren't anything new to the USW. They are traditions as old as the union itself.

In its first strategy without borders, the USW developed jointly in the United States and Canada with the birth of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC) in 1936.

Today, more than 70 years later, the 850,000-member USW has alliances with other trade unions on five continents and is working to develop the first global super union to keep pace with the increasing globalization of capital.

"The Steelworkers have understood international unionism since our birth," International President Leo W. Gerard said.

SWOC had organized 700,000 workers in North America by 1942, when delegates to a founding convention held in Cleveland voted unanimously to adopt a constitution and the name, United Steelworkers of America.

Wave of mergers

Just two years after our founding convention, the Aluminum Workers of America voted to unanimously join the union and the USW wasn't just for steelworkers anymore.

The Aluminum Workers was the first of at least a dozen major unions to join the USW and there were many other smaller combinations. Each brought a new wave of variety among the membership to make the USW the most diverse union in North America.

USW members do much more than produce ore in our nation's mines and steel in our mills. We are the largest industrial union in North America and engaged in manufacturing, mining, health care and pharmaceuticals, transportation, trades and numerous others services.

PACE largest merger

In 2005, the USW grew substantially by merging with PACE, the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union, a move that brought some 250,000 members into the USW fold. PACE was itself the merger of two large unions, the United Paperworkers

International Union and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers.

There has been growth in recent years from mergers with the United Rubber Workers, the American Flint Glass Workers, the Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Canada, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way employees in Canada, and other small independent unions.

The most recent combination came in April with the merger of the 1,200-member Independent Steelworkers Union, which had represented workers at the Mittal Steel plant in Weirton, W. Va.

"It's about bargaining leverage," USW District 1 Director Dave McCall said at the ISU merger ceremony. "It's about making sure our members get what they deserve for their blood, sweat and tears."

Working Locally, Uniting Globally

Uniting globally can build bargaining power locally.

Both the USW and the newly-formed Unite represent workers in about 12 major industries including metals, chemicals, paper, rubber, glass, shipyards and in the service sector.

We are both members of Global Union Federations such as the International Metalworkers Federation in Geneva and the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine & General Workers Unions in Brussels.

The USW also has strategic alliances throughout the world with unions in our core industries such as IG Metall, the German metalworkers' union, and SNTMMSRM, the National Union of Mining, Steel and Allied Workers of the Republic of Mexico.

But we need a stronger response to the economic globalization that is pushing down wages, benefits and retirement security while sending jobs to lower-cost countries that exploit workers.

The next compelling step is to create a true global union that can mobilize both locally and across borders to protect wages, benefits, employment rights and job security for all.

The USW has many of the same transnational corporations under labor contracts in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean Basin that are represented by Unite in Great Britain and Ireland. Among them are Alcoa Inc., Georgia-Pacific LLC and Alcan Inc.

We both have a record of cross-border union membership mergers that make us stronger and building power strategies that go beyond the typical cooperative agreements involving sharing research and supporting each other's organizing efforts.

Together we can make global unionism a reality.