

Thank you Stefan Löfven for your kind introduction. And thank you to the executive committees of the Industrial Workers' Union and Svenska Metall. I'm pleased to be here to make a few brief remarks to the IF Metall Congress of the newly merged organization of Svenska Metall and the Industrial Workers' Union.

First, I would like to extend greetings and best wishes for future success from my International President Tom Buffenbarger, the President of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Tom was unable to be with you here in person today, but is here with you in the spirit of solidarity.

As you face the future together, Svenska Metall and the Industrial Workers' Union - now IF Metall - you will be confronted with many challenges. The world is an unsettled place both economically and politically. Conservative forces are pushing their issues and ideas to the forefront everywhere and are seeking to permanently tip the balance in favor of capital and against the interests of workers.

For the next few minutes, I will address the situation that unions in the United States face as they try to keep the members they have and organize new members. Just three weeks ago, a delegation from Svenska Metall visited the United States to study this same topic. I believe that they were both shocked and dismayed at what they found.

For some people around the world, the United States is a symbol of freedom, hope and opportunity. For others, the United States symbolizes oppression and exploitation. The reality for American workers is that both of these images are correct. As we like to say – there is good news and bad news.

In theory, most working men and women in America today have the freedom and the legal right to join a union to make their lives better and their workplace safer. In fact, more than 17 million government and private sector workers in the United States belong to unions and have a voice in their workplace.

These workers earn an average of 28 percent more than workers without unions and are much more likely to have health and pension benefits provided by their employer, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, a government agency.

This is the good news. The bad news is that independent polls indicate that some 57 million nonunion workers say they want to be a part of unions too – but many are too afraid to join.

Why are they afraid? Although most workers have the legal right to form unions, nearly all private-sector non-government employers launch ruthless anti-union campaigns, using both legal and illegal tactics to block organizing efforts and to suppress workers' rights to join unions.

Fully 92 percent of private-sector employers force workers to attend meetings in which management argue against the union. Employers can legally force workers to attend these

meetings. We call them “captive audience” meetings because the workers cannot leave. Workers who leave or refuse to attend can be fired – legally fired.

During union organizing drives, more than 75 percent of private-sector employers force workers to sit in one-on-one meetings with their immediate supervisor to make sure that that the worker knows the “truth about unions” and to “change their minds” if they sense the worker may be considering joining a union. Again, workers who leave these meetings without permission or refuse to attend can be fired – legally fired.

But some employers don’t even worry about what is legal. During organizing drives, 25 percent of private-sector employers illegally fire workers involved in union activities. Of course we can go to the labor courts to try and get these workers’ jobs back, but given the political climate and the conservative nature of the labor courts in the United States, this often takes at least five years – that’s right - five years. And that assumes that there will even be a job left at that company five years later.

In the United States, today’s labor laws allow employers to “predict” – not “threaten” but to “predict” that a workplace will shut down if workers vote for the union.

Understandably, this also intimidates workers and makes them afraid to use their freedom to choose a union.

In fact, in the United States, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, our labor laws are so poorly enforced that there is really nothing to prevent employers from routinely breaking the law and getting away with it. It is a system based on brute power and fear. If an employer wants to operate union-free and is willing to spend the money to oppose the union, they can almost always keep the union out.

Friends, colleagues, comrades, I will be honest with you – the situation is not good in the United States for many workers. Union membership is declining, both in real numbers and as a percentage of the entire workforce. Our union density is very low.

In my travels, I am sometimes asked, “What about the International Labor Organization’s Labor Standards? Don’t they apply to American workers?” Many of you are undoubtedly familiar with these guarantees of some of the most fundamental of human rights – freedom of association, freedom to join unions, freedom to engage in collective bargaining.

These rights do not apply to the United States. The United States has only ratified two of the ILO conventions – Convention 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor (forced prison labor) and Convention 182 Abolition of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (child prostitution, slavery, drug trafficking and the like).

Sweden on the other hand has ratified all eight of the ILO Labor Standards. Your government, your society, you have agreed to recognize the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining, you have agreed to end discrimination in employment

and occupations, you have agreed to end forced and compulsory labor and you have agreed to end the abuses of child labor in all its forms.

Sweden is to be congratulated. You are to be congratulated.

I am aware of how high your union membership is and how broad your union density. I am aware that you have a strong social network that currently helps to protect workers. I am aware of some of the laws that guarantee your access and participation in employer activities and decisions.

Given this situation, some of you may be tempted to say, “It’s too bad about the unions in the United States, but that doesn’t have anything to do with us here in Sweden.” I urge you to not be complacent.

I am afraid that here in Sweden you have the seeds, the beginnings, of the same problems that are now causing such devastation in the United States. I believe that some of you may have heard some young people say “Unions? That is old news, history. It was important for my parents, but here in Sweden we have solved the problems which unions fought against.”

Or, you may have heard a Swedish worker say “I’m highly skilled – my employer needs me and we can reach an agreement on our own. Others may need a union, but I don’t.”

And finally, there are the employers – the multinational corporations – that stretch their operations around the globe. I know for a fact, that the positive face Swedish companies show at home is not the face they show in the United States. Oh, these companies may say “We are obeying the labor laws in the United States.”

But, I’ve just told you what the law allows – the law allows Swedish companies to operate union-free in the United States. And, Swedish citizens, Swedish management are living and working in the United States and being trained in the American way of doing business. Sooner or later, these managers will come home and you will have to deal with them.

Of course the door on the global economy swings both ways. There are many American companies doing business in Sweden too. Volvo and Saab come to mind. Let’s take Saab, which is a part of General Motors, as an example. You may have heard about the problems at Delphi, the largest auto parts supplier for General Motors. Delphi has declared bankruptcy and there is speculation that General Motors may do the same – declare bankruptcy.

What does Delphi management want from its union workers? Delphi wants wages to fall from about \$26 U.S. dollars an hour to about \$9 U.S. dollars an hour. This is a pay cut of almost 2/3. Imagine if you cashed your current paycheck and only had 1/3 of it to spend. Clearly, this would be a life changing event.

And, if the workers don't agree, Delphi management will ask the bankruptcy court – not the labor court – the bankruptcy court to rip up the collective bargaining agreements Delphi has with its unions. Rip them up and impose an agreement.

And, finally, as a last resort, if the workers still haven't given up enough, there is always the option on the part of Delphi to close the factories and move the work to where labor is cheaper and there are no unions.

To fight these attacks by Delphi management, as a member of the [Mobilizing@Delphi](#) coalition, the Machinists Union has joined forces with the United Auto Workers, International Union of Electrical Workers-Communication Workers of America, United Steelworkers, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and International Union of Operating Engineers.

"The 33,650 Delphi workers represented by our six unions are on the front lines of this critical struggle, but they are not alone; they have the full support and solidarity of more than 5.5 million active and retired members of our unions," said the coalition in a joint statement. "Together, we will do everything possible to make sure their rights and interests are protected."

This is the situation in the United States as American unions try to organize new members and to represent the members we already have.

Finally, I would like to make a brief comment on elections and how they can affect our ability to organize. In the United States we had our national election in 2004. As I'm sure all of you know, President George W. Bush was reelected. In 2006 you will face your own, potentially difficult, national elections.

With this in mind, let me give you just one example of what has happened during the Bush Administration. Most of you have probably heard about NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has been a disaster for the workers of Canada, The United States and Mexico.

George Bush now wants to extend a similar agreement to all of North America, Central and South America and the Caribbean region with the exception of Cuba, because Cuba is a communist country. (We will put aside the fact that China is also a communist country – that is a free trade discussion for another day.) The agreement is called the FTAA - Free Trade Area of the Americas.

In November, 2003 the trade ministers from the countries that would be a part of the FTAA met in Miami, Florida. Labor unions, including the Machinists Union were there too. We wanted to express our opposition.

Under the Homeland Security provisions which were passed to oppose terrorist activity, the Bush administration pumped over \$8 million U.S. dollars into Miami and regional police departments. These were tax dollars, including my tax dollars.

On the day we were to peacefully march in the streets of Miami, we were confronted with a massive police presence. Large sections of the city were blocked off, thousands of police in full riot gear limited where we could go, and by the end of the day we were confronted with shotguns, tear gas, rubber bullets, clubs and hundreds of arrests. A true police state.

Why have most of you probably not heard about this? The first reason is that the news media was largely prevented by the police from entering the area. The second reason was that November 20, 2003 was the day that music pop star Michael Jackson was arrested and accused of child molestation. The criminal charges against a celebrity won out over workers being beaten in the streets of Miami. Worker's rights are not news in America.

I am reaching the end of my time to speak with you today. I have given you a very big piece of bad news to think about. But, there is hope – there is always hope – and faith in our unions. Together, workers united and communicating and working together – no matter what country they are in – can face the future.

Recently I was doing some research on the internet. I stumbled on a photograph of the 1899 May Day march right here in Stockholm. Some of the marchers are looking straight into the camera – straight into today. They seem to be saying “Do not let us down, fight for us.”

That is why the creation of IF Metall is so important and that is why my union, the Machinists Union is here to pledge our support and solidarity to you today.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the heritage of our unions. The struggles we face are not new. They stretch back decades - over more than 100 years. While writing my remarks, the situation in the United States and in Sweden brought to mind the words of Samuel Gompers, one of the original founders of the American labor movement.

If our unions are to survive, if our unions are to grow, if our unions are to be the face of the future, we must heed the simple words that Samuel Gompers used time and again. He said we must agitate, we must educate and finally, we must organize. I leave you today with these same words – Agitate – Educate – and above all Organize!