The United States is a nation of immigrants. Since our creation, our country has welcomed the foreign born and we have reaped many benefits from the talents they brought here. A good part of our movement was built by people that migrated to our country. Those individuals include: Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor; Phillip Murray, founder and first President of the United Steelworkers; and Mother Jones, legendary Union organizer and all around social justice hell raiser.

The labor movement gained its strength from immigrants fleeing the devastation of two world wars in Europe. In the 1930’s and 1940’s, the modern labor movement was just forming in the United States. However, Europe had a history of Unionization and workers knew the benefits of belonging. So, when employers in the new world threatened them, they were undeterred in their resolve to organize.

Today, immigrants are still making important contributions to our society and economy, but the dynamics have changed. There are currently approximately 12 million undocumented workers in the United States. Some have crossed our borders unlawfully, but nearly all here came legally by securing student, guest worker and visitor visas and simply overstaying them. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous employers have learned to use immigration status as a way to exploit their workers. For fear of being deported, undocumented workers receive less than minimum wage, are not paid overtime and are denied the basic protections to create a safe workplace.

Bad employers have even learned how to take advantage of the foreign workers who are in the country legally. There are two types of guest worker visas issued by the United States. The first is an H-1B visa, which is given to skilled, non-agricultural workers and the second is H-2B, which is granted to seasonal farm workers. Employers largely determine the need to issue both types of visas. Because of that provision in the law, some employers have used the system to flood the market with workers for a particular skill. With more workers than jobs, corporations can keep wages and benefits low for both U.S. born and foreign employees.

As I said above, there are currently 12 million undocumented workers in the U.S. To arrest and deport all of them would be as impossible as it is impractical. It would be a shock to our economy and potentially separate thousands of families, which would create more problems. I should mention here that every Union member should be concerned about the exploitation of workers in this country for the same reason we should care about the current attack on public sector workers. To determine goals for wages in negotiations, our employers use something called “community averaging.” The Chamber of Commerce surveys its members to find the average wage for skilled and unskilled labor. If the average wage for a pipefitter in your region is $25.00 per hour, you must know how to pay at least that to attract quality workers. Since government (local, county, state and federal) is the largest employer in our country, cutting wages and benefits of public employees and exploiting foreign born workers will affect all of us.

The USW insists that any effort to reform must include:
- A humane pathway to citizenship.
- Jobs Conference
- March 25, 2013
- Spectrum Center, 785 Miller Road, Kalamazoo, MI
- Michigan Legislative Conference
- May 7, 2013
- CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH • 219 N. Capitol Avenue, Lansing, MI

D2-Sub-District Local Union Leadership Training—Wisconsin (Phony Session, Fundraising and Internal Organizing)
- May 1–7, 2013
- INTEREST IN • 3505 Jackson Road, Ann Arbor, MI

D2-Sub-District Local Union Leadership Training—Michigan (Phony Sessions, Steward and Internal Organizing)
- May 7–12, 2013
- PADDISON PARKER VALLEY HOTEL • 333 West College Ave., Kalamazoo, MI

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D2-Sub-District Local Union Leadership Training—Wisconsin (Phony Sessions, Steward and Internal Organizing)
- May 15, 2013
- CONCOURSE HOTEL • 13233 Hancock Drive, Taylor, MI

USW International Women’s Conference
- March 10–13, 2013
- WYNNHAM GRAND PITTSBURGH • 500 Commonwealth Place, Pittsburgh PA

Upcoming D2 Events

USW D2 2013 Financial Officers’ LM, 999 & 999E2
- March 5, 2013
- USW LOCAL 32075 HALL • 3010 James Savage Road, Madison, WI
- March 6, 2013
- CIVIC CLUB • 183 North Street, Manistee, MI
- March 7, 2013
- TEMPESTI LOCAL 7 HALL • 3220 Miller Road, Kalamazoo, MI
- March 8, 2013
- USW D2 SOUTHIERN MI SUB-OFFICE • 12333 Hancock Drive, Taylor, MI
- USW District 2 Council Conference
- April 24—28, 2013
- PADDISON PARKER VALLEY HOTEL • 333 West College Ave., Kalamazoo, MI
- Michigan State Legislative Conference
- May 7, 2013
- CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH • 219 N. Capitol Avenue, Lansing, MI

March 2-3, 2013, District 2 held a day and a half workshop in East Lansing, MI, to inform and educate the members on Michigan’s RTW law. This weekend training had attendance of over 260 Union Members from all over the state of Michigan. In fact, it was so well attended, extra seating had to be set up in the crowded room.

The workshop was designed to include a legal view from the law firm of Leggio & Israel, PC; a training segment by Guillermo Perez from the USW Education Dept.; and a floor discussion on what its like to work in a right to work state from James Carvin, Asst. to the Director of District 9.