

## **37th Grand Lodge Convention of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers**

### **CLOSING ADDRESS by R. Thomas Buffenbarger, International President**

Brothers and sisters, I am proud of us.

In the eventful week that is now coming to a close, we looked trouble --- big trouble for our union--- straight in the eye.

We did not blink or flinch or back away.

Instead, we did what Machinists have always done.

We stepped up.

We took the Program for Progress that this convention adopted 32 years ago, and gave it a long over due make over.

Next year, its four dollar increase plus the normal weighted average estimated increase of 3.02 percent will give us the resources required to run a strong, first class union.

And with the shift over to the consumer price index in 2011, we will have secured our financial future for the next forty years.

During this convention, we pledged support for the New Democratic Party and the Parti Quebecois in Canada, and voted for a national holiday celebrating the legendary labor leader Ceasar Chavez.

We rebuffed efforts to amend the IAM Constitution to change the way this democratic union conducts its elections and its business.

We approved resolutions pledging support for Employee Free Choice, fundamental human rights, universal health care coverage and a new national energy policy;

We pushed for closer congressional monitoring of the National Mediation Board and much greater enforcement of the Railroad Labor Act; and laid the ground work for a national technical skills training policy.

Yes, sisters and brothers, we put our house in order!

I am so proud of you.

I am so proud of each and everyone of you – from the oldest to the youngest member here --- from the strikers of 751 to the flight attendants of 2339 --- from the brothers who raised hell over points of order to the sisters who raised points of clarification --- from the committee members who took their charges so seriously to the members of this Executive Council --- each and every single, solitary one of you deserves the thanks of a grateful union.

Let me say it again, I AM ... SO PROUD ... OF YOU.

You stepped up. You put our house in order.

We put our house in order.

And by so doing, we showed the world --- showed our friends and especially, showed our enemies --  
- what Machinists are made of.

In a time of fear and uncertainty, the IAM stands as a rock --- strong, proud and fearless.

This union of ours has been around for 120 years now ---- and nobody has given us anything --- ever.

Nobody gave us the right to bargain collectively --- that's something we fought for, something we won.

Nobody ever decreed that North American workers have a right to fair wages --- good benefits --- a middle class living standard.

To get those things, we struck the railroads and the factories and the airlines. We won those benefits --- negotiated those wages.

And all along, we've known full well --- just as we know right now ---that we cannot take anything for granted. Always, the corporate predators are out there, watching and waiting for a chance to take it all back.

Over the decades, we've endured punitive legislation, unfair trade deals and government harassment.

But never --- never, at least in living memory --- have we experienced anything to compare with the lying, crooked, worker-hating,

union-busting, job-exporting, economy-wrecking, deficit-exploding, chicken hawk Administration of George W. Bush.

"The Bush era" --- that's what the pundits call the past eight years --- and they spell it e---r---a.

But me?

I call it the Bush error --- spelled e—r—r—o—r.

From the point of view of ordinary folks, this has been the worst national Administration in modern American history.

This Bush crowd can't do anything right.

If they had a motto, what would it be?

“Good job, Brownie?”

Or maybe “Mission Accomplished ---Not”

What we have got to understand --- and I know it’s not easy to accept --- is that George Bush and Dick Cheney and the rest of them don’t really work for you and me.

About what we think ---or want --- or hope for, they do not give a big fat rat’s rear end.

And they never have.

The real constituency of this Republican Administration --- and Bush himself has said as much --- are the boys in the corporate board rooms

If you’re a banker or a broker --- an oil company executive --- a commodities speculator ---a hedge fund operator --- how could you not love George W Bush and Richard H. Cheney?

What’s the “H” stand for?

“Halliburton” --- what else?

If it’s not his middle name, it ought to be.

Look --- for the boardroom boys and the country club set, George W. Bush has been a great President.

Just think about it.

Bush has showered these folks with tax breaks.

In the financial markets and the commodity markets, he took the regulators off the beat and let the sharks swim free. At the gas pump and in the supermarket, we can all see the results.

As yet another gift to his corporate buddies, Bush packed the Labor Department and the NLRB with fanatical right wing ideologues. For the past eight years, these crazies have been waging their own little jihad against the labor movement.

But as much as corporate America appreciates what Bush has done to hurt the labor movement, there’s an even more special gift he’s given them --- and that is China.

There was a time when Republicans and conservatives in this country had no use for what they used to call Red China.

A few of them --- mostly, religious conservatives who actually care about human rights --- still feel that way.

On this, I agree with them.

I have this old fashioned idea that people should have the freedom of religion, freedom of speech and the right to bargain collectively.

But for the big corporations, Canadian as well as American, China is .... well, Disneyland.

They just love it over there.

In China, American and Canadian corporations don't have to worry about troublemakers --- you know, people who are always demanding higher wages and better working conditions.

The Communist State takes care of all of that. And because they do so with ruthless efficiency, says a recent study from the Economic Policy Institute, Chinese workers make 40% to 85% less than they otherwise would.

A damn shame?

It is --- and I believe that some day, workers over there are going to do something about it.

If we had governments in Washington and Ottawa that were worth a damn --- and we don't ---you'd think they'd see how unfair it is for American and Canadian workers and companies to have to compete against this kind of totalitarian production.

But if they see it, they don't care. Short term corporate profits --- that's what matters.

And we have paid the price.

Since George Bush took office in 2001, the USA has sent more than two million jobs --- two thirds of them in manufacturing --- straight to China.

Every year, in other words, we've sent them as many American jobs --- 353,000 --- as there are people in Akron, Ohio.

So far, California has lost 269,000 jobs to the China trade.

Texas 136,000 ---

New York 106,000---

Illinois 99,000---

Pennsylvania 78,000 ---

North Carolina 77,000 ---

Florida 72,000 ---

Ohio ---66,000

The list goes on--- and on --- and on some more. There's no end to it.

And what do we get from China in return?

Well, in 2006, China's exports to the United States were valued at \$288 billion. And China's imports from the United States came to grand total of --- \$62 billion.

It doesn't take a CPA to figure that one out, does it?

We are getting royally screwed.

And that is happening with the active, positive encouragement of the good-for-nothing governments of the United States and Canada.

A bunch of bums, brothers and sisters, that's what they are And here in the USA, we have our chance right now to throw them the hell out.

I say to you, brothers and sisters, that for us, this is the most important election since the days of FDR.

During the Bush error, we lost millions of manufacturing jobs. And believe me --- if we let the Republicans con us into giving them the White House for four more years, we will lose millions more.

By the time the corporate greed machine has finished with us, North America will no longer be what once it was ----the world's greatest industrial region.

We'll be hollow --- washed up --- in terminal decline.

That's a fact --- and we had damn well better face up to it.

The Republicans this year are running John McCain for President --- and let's face it, he's a strong candidate.

McCain comes across like a regular guy --- and certainly, he has a war record that entitles him to respect.

But President McCain?

I don't think so.

When you look at John McCain's record in the Senate, --- well, it's not a pretty sight.

John McCain has never seen a trade deal he does not like --- he's a NAFTA man and a CAFTA man and he's all for the Colombia FTA.

McCain supported the Bush plan to privatize Social Security.

He's is against EFCA --- he's against the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act --- he voted to eliminate the minimum wage.

As a candidate for President, John McCain is proposing to give huge new tax breaks to oil companies and other major corporations

But at the same time, he is also proposing --- get this --- to tax our health care benefits.

John Mc Cain personally blocked a bill to protect overtime rights.

He voted against extending unemployment benefits ---and for raising the age of eligibility for Medicare.

McCain is a guy who says --- and who genuinely believes --- that we are better off now than we were eight years ago. According to McCain's principal economic advisor, our problems are merely "psychological."

John McCain is no friend of ours.

On the issues that really and truly matter to working people, there's not a dime's worth of difference between John McCain and George W. Bush.

For us, a McCain victory would be a disaster.

But it could happen. And that I why I want to speak to you from the heart.

Proudly and with great enthusiasm, our union has endorsed for the office of President of the United States Senator Barack Obama of Illinois.

In a world that was even a little bit rational, there's no doubt in my mind that Barack would be a shoo-in. He'd win by a landslide.

But the world is not always rational. And frankly, I am very deeply concerned.

In 2008, the Republicans have nothing to run on --- nothing but the record of George W. Bush.

On the issues, in other words, they are running on empty. They cannot beat Barack Obama.

But there's one thing they can do --- and you know as well as I do what it is.

At a personal level, they will try to tear Barack Obama to pieces.

Lies, insinuations, phony stories spread on the internet and by word of mouth --- and amplified on the air by Rupert Murdoch's Fox News and a whole rogue's gallery of radio gasbags.

And race?

You bet they'll use race. They are using it already.

When you go back home, just listen --- you'll hear it all over the place.

Obama's a Muslim..

He's not patriotic.

Obama's arrogant, they say, which is just another way of asking "Who the hell does this --- fill in the blank --- think he is.?"

In a restaurant the other day, I overheard two guys talking.

"If Obama wins," says the first one, "they're going to think that they are in charge."

"Yeah," says the second one, "I wouldn't give them the satisfaction."

A couple of dunces?

Yup --- dumb as a bag of rocks. If brains were dynamite, these two couldn't blow their noses.

But this stuff --- and a lot worse --- is out there.

You know it and I know it.

In 1960, when John F. Kennedy was running for President, the same kind of stuff was out there --- only then, it was about religion.

If Kennedy got elected, they said, he'd be talking orders from the Pope.

Next thing you know, they'll be moving the Vatican over here. And if Kennedy gets in, all those people --- you know, the Irish and the Italians and the Poles and all the rest of them --- are going to start getting the idea that they're just as good as anybody else.

In the end, Jack Kennedy won --- but by the tiniest of margins.

The religion issue did hurt him.

It damn near beat him.

And when I look at Barack Obama, I cannot help but think of JFK.

Like Jack Kennedy, Barack is an astonishing young man--- vigorous, attractive, really smart and blessed with an accomplished wife and beautiful children.

But what's most important is this.

Barack Obama is on our side.

John McCain is not. All McCain has to offer is a warmed-over of the Bush Administration.

And that is why we are going to war.

The issue, my dear brothers and sisters, is not race.

It's rates.

This election is about the rate of unemployment.

It's about the rate of foreclosure in our communities --- about the rate at which companies are shutting down factories in North America and shipping the jobs to China.

It's about insurance rates --- about the rates we're paying for electricity, natural gas, heating oil and gasoline. And it is also about the rate at which our brave young servicemen and women have given up their lives and their limbs and their futures in this pointless war in Iraq.

From day one, John McCain was the number one cheerleader for Bush's war.

When Bush, Cheney & Co, were in the process of lying us into Iraq, McCain was all over the tube, blabbing on about wmd's and promising that the war would be over in no time at all.

McCain said that our troops would be greeted as liberators --- and that the Iraqis would pay for the war from their oil revenues.

And now, two trillion dollars and 4,300 American lives later, this guy claims to have superior judgment?

When Barack Obama said that we should set a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, McCain attacked him savagely. Obama, he said, was willing to lose a war in order to win an election.

And then?

Then, Condoleezza Rice flew over to Baghdad to negotiate guess what --- a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq.

For the last eight years, the Bushies have been strutting around the world, talking tough and acting dumb.

Haven't you had enough of it?

Sure as hell, I have.

If Barack Obama is President of the United States, he will sign EFCA into law..

If John McCain is President, he will veto the bill.

Barack Obama will give incentives to companies that invest here in the United States --and to do away with tax subsidies for outsourcing.

Obama wants to create hundreds of thousands of green jobs --- jobs that could revive and renew what is known today as “the rust belt.

And McCain?

McCain doesn't have a clue.

Barack Obama has proposed a windfall profits tax on the oil companies --- with the proceeds used to help out our hard-pressed working families.

“No way,” says John McCain.

He wants to give to the oil companies billions of dollars in new tax breaks.

John McCain is the same old, same old, same old thing --- a clone of the Bush error.

Bush and McCain, McCain and Bush. They are indistinguishable --- inseparable --- insufferable.

But between John McCain and Barack Obama, the differences are night and day.

Obama will move America forward --- McCain is stuck in reverse.

Obama's for the working people --- McCain is for the bosses.

And that's the bottom line.

Urgently, Barack Obama needs our help.

And we'll be there for him.

And once and for all, we will put an end to the Bush error.

For a hundred and twenty years, our union has taken the point.

In the great struggles for human rights and human dignity, we've been there.

We have a great history --- a proud history. And on November 4, 2008, the fighting Machinists are going to help make history.

Brothers and sisters, there's a big job ahead of us.

Let's get it done.