

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to a full page ad placed in the Virginian Review on Wednesday, November 21, 2007 by the USW. They showed an impressive table showing their perceived strengths and weaknesses of being a "go it alone" union. They want us to believe that they can control whether or not MeadWestvaco, will continue to operate this mill, converting plant or any other location. They try to convince us that the USW is our friend, ally, and only hope for securing the future of our jobs, our mill and our community. They think we are not intelligent enough to realize that our contract with MeadWestvaco expired December 1, 2006 and try to place fear in our hearts by telling us we will not have a contract once we disassociate from USW.

I have been a union member all my adult life. I was a member of the Teamsters Union when I worked at UPS after graduating high school. When I gained employment at what was then Westvaco, I joined the union and have been a member for almost 33 years. I cannot imagine not being a member of a union. I just believe too many people, including the international unions, like the USW, have forgotten that the "Union" is the people, not the officers, not the stewards, and not the internationals. The union is its members and the true strength of any union is in the resolve and dedication of its membership not in its support groups.

Internationals were formed to be support groups for the locals, going on the theory that there is strength in numbers and by sharing lessons learned to help other locals. Somewhere along the way, in the manner of "Big Business", the roles have been reversed. The internationals believe that the purpose of the locals is to provide them with dues instead of them working for us, the members. The big internationals continue to outlive their time by merging with other internationals, thus in my 33 years at the mill I have been a member of UPIU, PACE, and USW. I am tired of sitting in contract proposal meetings and continually hearing from the international representatives the reason we should give up our benefits is because "that is the national trend". A trend set by the international unions.

I have never been one to give up anything without a fight and it is the reason I am a proud member of the Covington Paperworkers Union not because we the members are on some idealistic crusade but because we want our mill and our community to grow and prosper. I would much rather align myself with friends, family and neighbors that share the same risks and rewards. I don't understand why anyone would want to support a group (USW) that has already shown the only thing they stand for is keeping our dues in their pockets, a group that has nothing to loose no matter what the outcome of our negotiations here.

I do not believe that the intent of the Covington Paperworkers Union is to "go it alone". I believe our intent is to "go it together", to show our strength, resolve, and dedication to preserving our jobs, our mill, and our communities. Together we are a force to be reckoned with, together we are a UNION!

Respectively submitted,
Michael C. Wickline