



Name: **Edwin Palma**

Name of Union: **Union sindical obrera (Workers' Trade Union)**

Providence/Country: : **Colombia**

Job/Title: **Vice-President (formerly Chemical Analyst)**

Can you tell us something interesting about your city of origin?

I come from Barrancabermeja, Columbia's oil capital, where oil exploitation activities began about 90 years ago. The city is also home to Columbia's largest refinery, which produces 290,000 barrels of oil per day.

What kind of work do your members do?

Our members are all in the oil industry. We represent many contractors who work with the government corporation Ecopetrol, as well as workers with the public corporation. The current Columbian legislation prohibits us from organizing workers from other sectors. We are challenging this provision before the courts and a decision on its constitutionality is expected shortly.

What are the key challenges facing workers in your country today?

Our main challenge is to increase the rate of unionization. Around 4% of workers are unionized, and only 2% are covered under a collective agreement. The companies are trying to discourage workers from unionizing; they lay their workers off and the legislation is not very effective in protecting them. The companies are also offering non-unionized workers the same benefits as

those negotiated for unionized workers, to discourage them from unionizing. The right to collective bargaining is also a major issue. Just recently, on August 5, some 25,000 subcontractors for Ecopetrol, members of our union, went on a one-day strike to fight for the right to bargain directly with the government corporation rather than with the contractors. The next step might well be an unlimited strike.

What do you hope to accomplish during the Steelworkers' Constitutional Convention?

I would like to strengthen our international ties of solidarity, and make connections with workers from other companies in the extractive sector. International solidarity is all the more important now that we are dealing with transnational corporations.

What do you think of Las Vegas?

It's an impressive, spectacular, fascinating cityx

