

# Power

## Action Plan

Our union was organized by courageous workers who united to overcome the power of dictatorial employers, and to win their fair share of social and economic justice for the wealth their labor produced.

Winning the right to bargain collectively for better wages, benefits and working conditions has been crucial to the progress we have made ever since those initial triumphs.

In spite of dramatic changes in the economy and the workplace over the years, that basic proposition — the need for collective action to secure our members' well-being — is as true today as it was on the day of our union's founding.

The purpose of all of our union's programs, whether in the workplace, legislatures or election campaigns, has been and continues to be to strengthen our members' hand in bargaining and our members' quality of life.

Our activism in the coming years must be judged on the very same basis: the mission of building our union's bargaining power to win improved wages, benefits and retirement security for our members and for working people everywhere.

### Growing Challenges to Bargaining

Today, we're confronting challenges as great as any in our union's history:

- ⇒ Globalization continues to drive our jobs abroad as corporations and financiers pit worker against worker and region against region in a race to the bottom on wages and working conditions.
- ⇒ Lousy trade deals, combined with dumping, have wiped out millions of North American manufacturing jobs and threaten to undermine the quality of life we've worked for decades to secure.
- ⇒ Employers often needlessly demand concessions, resist pattern agreements, and try to unload the runaway cost of health care in the United States and undermine universal coverage in Canada.
- ⇒ Employers that fail to address hazards that are the root causes of safety problems and that lead to workplace accidents and disease.
- ⇒ Defined benefit pensions and Social Security are under vicious attack by the Bush administration, Wall Street, Bay Street and the corporations and politicians who do their bidding.

- ⇒ Bankruptcy laws provide mechanisms for corporations to destroy our contracts, wipe out retiree pensions and health care and leave workers without protection of their wages, benefits and pensions.
- ⇒ Right-wing radicals are hell bent on destroying workers' rights, our bargaining clout, and the half-century of progress we've made toward social and economic justice.
- ⇒ A National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in the United States that is savaging long-established worker rights.
- ⇒ Every one of these threats is ultimately a challenge to our bargaining power. Yet finding solutions will depend on more than our skill at the negotiating table.

## Overcoming the Odds

Throughout our history, our union has won out in the face of formidable odds. Time and again, educating our members on issues and mobilizing them for action has made the difference. In recent years, this strategy has enabled us to:

- ⇒ Stop Bridgestone/Firestone and Titan Tire from destroying pattern bargaining and the rights of our members in rubber and tire.
- ⇒ Stop companies like Ivaco and Stelco from using regressive bankruptcy protection laws in Canada to destroy our wages, benefits and pensions.
- ⇒ Win legislation in Canada (the Westray Bill) that makes corporations, their directors and executives criminally liable for failing to prevent workers' deaths.
- ⇒ Launch corporate campaigns that prevented outlaw financiers and renegade corporations from using lockouts or forced strikes to destroy our union at AK Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, CF&I/Oregon Steel and Ravenswood Aluminum, among others.

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- ⇒ Launch corporate campaigns against companies like Weyerhaeuser to protect our seniority rights in our collective agreements.
- ⇒ Mobilize community allies and media to secure a strong new labor agreement without a strike for more than 9,000 shipyard workers at Northrop Grumman Newport News.
- ⇒ Bargain innovative contracts that prevented bankruptcies from destroying tens of thousands of workers' jobs in North American steel and made our members the highest paid in the industry.
- ⇒ Restore a measure of health care protection for hundreds of thousands of steel industry retirees whose health care benefits had been ripped away by lopsided and inequitable anti-worker bankruptcy laws.
- ⇒ Limit our jobs from being shipped to China and other low wage countries by bargaining agreements in both rubber and steel which mandate reinvestment in domestic operations, secure guarantees of no plant closings and guaranteed employment levels.
- ⇒ Forge global alliances in steel, rubber, aluminum, copper, forestry products and other major industries that challenge corporate efforts to undermine our bargaining leverage by pitting us against workers in other countries.
- ⇒ Secure tariffs that provided temporary relief from illegally traded steel and gave the industry the breathing room it needed to consolidate and grow.
- ⇒ Negotiate significant improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions in our security, education and transportation sectors in the face of difficult employers. In the case of the airport screeners in Canada, our union was able to significantly raise wages and get much needed improvements in training standards.
- ⇒ Bargain employer contributions to multi-million-dollar Public Policy Funds that will be used to promote domestic manufacturing and protect our livelihoods.



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## Keys to Building Power at the Bargaining Table and Beyond

Overcoming these challenges has shown that winning requires three strategic components:

- ⇒ Structures for effectively communicating with members.
- ⇒ A plan for educating members on issues.
- ⇒ A program to mobilize our membership for victory.

This strategy — communicating, educating, mobilizing — has evolved from innovative and successful programs, such as:

- ⇒ **Rapid Response**, the union's nonpartisan, grassroots communication and education program for rallying unprecedented clout in dozens of hard-fought legislative battles — especially in battling unfair trading policies.
- ⇒ **Steelworkers Communication and Action Network (SCAN)**, Canada's expansion of the Rapid Response concept to include education and action on bargaining, organizing and contract campaigns, as well as building solidarity with other unions and organizations.
- ⇒ **Building Power**, the innovative contract training course for mobilizing local unions to run offensive campaigns and win better contracts.
- ⇒ **Stand Up for Steel**, a labor-management alliance, funded by union-negotiated company contributions, that has mobilized broad-based activism for saving the North American steel industry.
- ⇒ **Leadership Scholarship**, a four-year course that has equipped 800 local union activists with essential skills.

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- ⇒ **Legislative Internship**, a program that prepared 140 members to forcefully lobby elected officials in Congress and within their home districts.
- ⇒ **Parliamentary Lobby Program**, which has developed Steelworker member lobbyists to promote our issues to members of the Federal Parliament and, more recently, to members of provincial legislatures.
- ⇒ **Health and Safety Training**, workshops and conferences that better equipped our health and safety committees to prevent injury to our members and better investigate the causes of unsafe conditions.
- ⇒ **Women of Steel Conferences**, regular meetings at every level of our union at which female members receive education in becoming more effective activists.

**These programs work because they:**

- ⇒ Communicate directly with our membership.
- ⇒ Address issues that impact members' lives.
- ⇒ Bring Steelworkers' voices to legislative and political decisions.
- ⇒ Strengthen members' leverage in bargaining.

They have proved successful because they recognize that union power depends on informed, involved and active members. Simply put, an engaged membership builds stronger locals and a more powerful union.

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