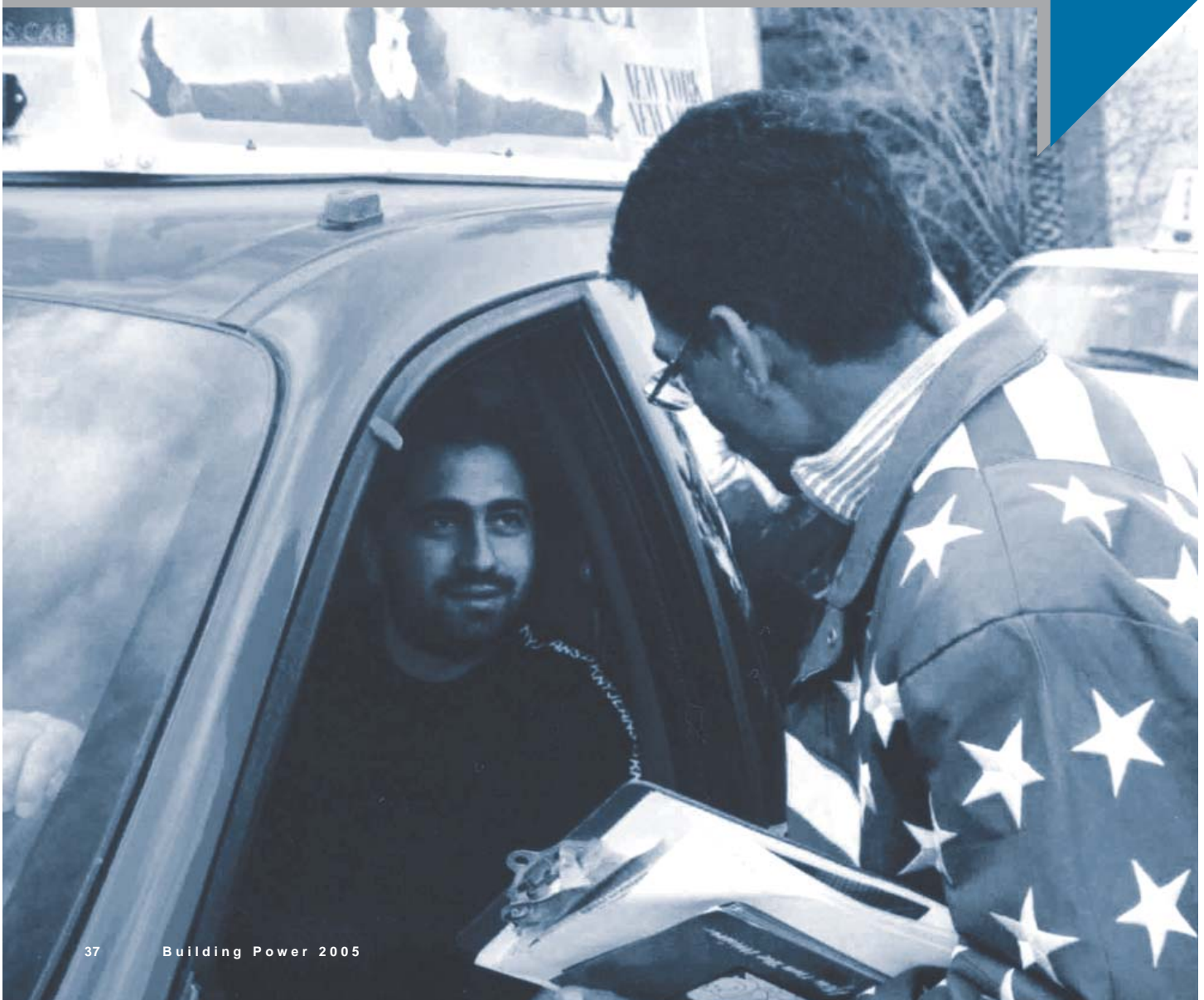


# *Building Power*

Through Membership  
Growth and Density



**U**nion density — the level of unionization within an employer, industry, or community — is directly related to our members' ability to bargain and maintain pattern collective bargaining agreements, and to participate effectively in political action at all levels. A lower percentage of unionization at any of these levels makes it a lot tougher to bargain fair wages, benefits and working conditions, and to have an impact on the political climate that is favorable to working families.

The connection between organizing for greater density and bargaining better contracts is even more crucial in today's intensely competitive global economy. Failing to organize, therefore, inevitably means losing clout at the bargaining table and in our communities.

Keeping organizing current and relevant means we need to stay up-to-date on labor force trends and worker attitudes. In that context, it is important to review our approach to organizing on an ongoing basis. Such a review is about to take place in Canada through the National Office and the districts. We are proud to note that a recent Canadian Labour Congress study identified the United Steelworkers as being the top organizing union in Canada in nine of the last 10 years.

## Organize the Unorganized

In 1998, our Union undertook the most comprehensive and critical examination of its organizing structure and efforts in our history. The Organizing Task Force engaged our Union's members and staff in the United States and Canada at all levels to develop a comprehensive set of principles and an action plan to grow the union by deepening our Union's commitment to organize the unorganized.

It is clear that the Task Force's principles and action plan elements are as valid today as they were in 1998:

- ⇒ There must be strong commitment and efforts by our local union members at the grassroots level. We must continue to break down the institutional barriers preventing motivated members from becoming involved in organizing.
- ⇒ We must strategically focus our organizing efforts where they are most likely to be successful — by employer, industry, geography and workforce demographics.
- ⇒ There must be greater accountability at all levels of the union for effective use of organizing resources, including the International Union and the Districts.
- ⇒ We must carefully select and continuously train our organizing staff.
- ⇒ Our communications with prospective members must become more sophisticated, both in substance and in methods.
- ⇒ We should utilize our clout with employers to neutralize their opposition to organizing non-union facilities.

- ⇒ We cannot consider an organizing drive completed until a first contract is ratified.
- ⇒ Organizing non-members in "open shops" represents a significant opportunity for building our Union.
- ⇒ We need to involve political leaders in our organizing struggles.
- ⇒ We should experiment with innovative organizing techniques.
- ⇒ We must ensure that every worker has the opportunity to have union representation in order to have a voice at work.

While the basic organizing vision laid out by the Task Force is still valid, today we have nearly six years of experience of operating under the Organizing Task Force Report's principles and action plans. It is crucial that we integrate this experience to continue our journey to becoming an "organizing union" in Canada and the United States, and we must integrate this experience through the following measures:

- ⇒ Our members, local unions, elected officers and staff must rededicate themselves to using their bargaining power and relationships in their communities to require employers to give employees at non-union facilities the opportunity to decide whether they want to be represented, without interference from their employer. This is among the best ways that our members and local unions can help build power in our Union.
- ⇒ Under the current conditions in both countries (with the exception of the Province of Quebec), we cannot continue to rely on, and pour precious resources into, organizing through the broken procedures of the National Labor Relations Board in the United States and provincial labor laws in Canada. Our Union's experience, and the experience of other unions, shows that a lower percentage of new union members is being organized through traditional elections. During the last several years nearly half of our Union's newly organized members overall — and almost two-thirds of our newly organized members in manufacturing industries — have organized with the help of neutrality and voluntary recognition arrangements.



"Women, who make up a larger part of our workforce than ever before, are more likely than men to join unions."



- ⇒ We must continue our efforts to develop a more diverse group of volunteer member organizers, and address institutional barriers that continue to prevent talented members from having the opportunity to help grow our Union.
- ⇒ Our experience over the past several years has shown that women, immigrant workers and younger workers are extremely receptive to forming unions. We need to create more initiatives like Steelworkers' Summer, which gives young adults, many of whom are children of our members, the opportunity to experience first-hand the struggles workers face when trying to organize.
- ⇒ Women, who make up a larger part of our workforce than ever before, are more likely than men to join unions, and account for nearly half of the labor movement's total membership. Our Canadian districts have taken the lead in responding to these trends with bargaining and public policy actions aimed at helping people to better balance the varied demands at home and at work. These actions must be expanded to assume a more central role in our organizing strategies.
- ⇒ We should make fuller use of available technologies that can further build activism among our members and retirees, including the ability to match our Union's members and retirees with non-union workers in the same neighborhood during organizing drives.
- ⇒ Our Union needs new mechanisms for creating partnerships with our local unions to organize non-union facilities of a particular employer, industry or community. Our "organizing partnership" program has had some success; however, we need to find new ways to provide incentives and cost-sharing arrangements for our local unions to take on organizing challenges. We will never have enough full-time organizing staff to organize at the levels we need to maintain and build the power of our Union.

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- ⇒ Our Union should use our significant influence, along with that of other trade unions globally, to support the expansion and strengthening of organizing "codes of conduct." These agreements are negotiated between multinational corporations and the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) and other global union federations. Like neutrality agreements, "codes of conduct" are designed to ensure companies respect workers' organizing rights on a global basis.
- ⇒ Our Union should continue to experiment with new forms of allied progressive activist organizations. These initiatives include the Associate Membership Program, which provides working people, students and others with a place in our organization without having to be connected through collective bargaining. Another initiative is pursuing collective bargaining rights for "members-only" local unions, in workplaces where workers are not yet at the point of achieving majority union status. These innovative forms of union organization provide many opportunities for our members to become involved in organizing in their communities.
- ⇒ We need to celebrate our diversity and connection with our communities. Building power requires the active support of members and their families. And, it requires reaching out and building alliances with cultural and community leaders.
- ⇒ We must continue to pursue long-range strategic plans to organize in our core industries. At the same time, we must continue to build our organizing capacity in health care, security, public sector, education, non-profit, transportation and other service sectors where collective bargaining agreements can be secured and our Union's diversity can be strengthened. We have a growing number of activist members in these sectors who are able and willing to help organize their brothers and sisters in non-union workplaces, and we need to give them opportunities to gain organizing experience.

"We must ensure that every worker has the opportunity to have union representation in order to have a voice at work."

- ⇒ There are many unaffiliated, independent unions in the United States and Canada, which are looking to join the strength of an international union. In many cases, these independent unions represent members in the same industries as our Union, and they are struggling financially and organizationally. We need to work to develop a more systematic approach to giving these organizations a home in our Union.
  
- ⇒ In the United States, we should expand our program to educate members of Congress and their staffs about the employer intimidation and utter trampling on workers' rights that all too often occurs during an organizing campaign. Working through our Legislative Office, we should continue to arrange meetings with the appropriate Congressional representatives every time an employer discriminates or fires a worker for union activity, or otherwise attempts to discourage unionization. This is the necessary groundwork that must be developed if we want to change the law to restore workers' rights to organize. In Canada, we will continue to work for stronger protections of organizing rights at both the provincial and federal levels.
  
- ⇒ Our Union has been forged through numerous mergers over the course of our history. We will continue to pursue mergers in order to strengthen our membership density in industries and to build greater power in both bargaining and politics.

All of these ideas expand on the core principles of the Organizing Task Force Report, and have grown from our experiences in implementing the Report's action plans to mobilize our members, organize the unorganized and build the power of our Union.

“Building power requires the active support of members and their families.”





United Steelworkers of America

AFL-CIO•CLC

Five Gateway Center  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

412-562-2400

412-562-2484 (fax)

[www.uswa.org](http://www.uswa.org)