

Building Power

Through Legislative
and Political Activism



Workers' rights are under unrelenting attack by right-wing politicians, their corporate allies and think tanks in both the United States and Canada. In the United States, this assault includes:

- ⇒ Attacking retirement security by weakening Social Security and ERISA.
- ⇒ Attacking collective bargaining by threats to revive the TEAM Act, a priority of the National Right-to-Work Committee.
- ⇒ Attacking overtime pay not only through the regulatory process but by the reintroduction of Comp Time legislation.
- ⇒ Attacking occupational safety and health by "reforming" OSHA and MSHA to further weaken them.
- ⇒ Attacking manufacturing by supporting NAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), Fast Track, China free trade, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

In Canada, the federal government and many provincial governments are undermining social standards through underfunding, privatization and deregulation. This crisis is taking place in health care, education and pensions. The principle of universal access to quality public services in these important areas is being replaced by the practice of quality service to those who can afford it.

In a growing number of jurisdictions, governments are weakening labour laws to require certification votes instead of card-based certification, and limiting the power of Labour Boards to effectively remedy illegal employer unfair labour practices to defeat the union. At the same time, these governments are downloading the enforcement of minimum standards legislation to unions by requiring that laws of general application be enforced through collective agreements.

At the same time, employers are using these regressive laws to attack our members' rights and economic security. One example is their increasing use of bankruptcy protection laws in Canada to attack wages, benefits and pensions. In fact, employers are pushing for changes to insolvency and bankruptcy legislation that will further limit workers' rights to recover the wages and other benefits owing to them when their employer becomes insolvent or goes bankrupt.

We recognize that combating these attacks will require even greater and more effective legislative and political activism than the extraordinary efforts our members made in the 2004 elections, in winning the Westray Bill, and in battling unfair trade.

In the forefront of this activism is our Union's pledge of unrelenting opposition to corporate and legislative efforts to weaken occupational health and safety laws, regulations and enforcement in the United States and Canada. Following the inspiring example of our Union in Canada, we will fight for effective United States legislation that will impose meaningful penalties on employers who cause the death of workers through corporate misconduct.

Advancing Employee Free Choice

Organizing in the United States is being routinely savaged — especially in the industrial sector — by the complete bastardization of the labor rights guaranteed by the Wagner Act.

The precipitous decline in union membership over the past several decades has gone hand-in-glove with the routine violation of workers' organizing rights and the repeated failure of the NLRB to rectify these injustices and the erosion in collective bargaining rights that they have created.

To reverse this decline demands that national labor law be strengthened to reassert the rights of workers to organize — free from intimidation, threats and firing. Achieving this goal will require Congress to pass the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). This law, if passed, would:

- ⇒ Give workers the power to certify a union as their bargaining agent as soon as a majority of them in a unit have signed cards authorizing representation.
- ⇒ Provide first contract mediation and arbitration after 90 days of bargaining to prevent employers from stalling for months, and sometimes years, in attempts to break down member solidarity.
- ⇒ Strengthen penalties for employers that attempt to thwart organizing or first contract negotiations by requiring the NLRB to file for a mandatory federal court injunction against an employer whenever an employer has discriminated against employees or threatened to discharge them.
- ⇒ Triple the amount of back pay liability for an employer found guilty of discharging or discriminating against an employee during an organizing campaign or a first contract drive.
- ⇒ Provide civil fines of up to \$20,000 per violation against employers found to have willfully or repeatedly violated employees' rights during an organizing campaign or first contract drive.

Winning this legislation in the United States will be a key step toward reversing the decline in union membership.

In Canada, the federal government is undertaking a review of the Canada Labour Code. While this Code is only applicable to a small percentage of the workforce, progressive changes at the federal level will provide leadership for provinces and territories to make positive amendments to their laws. Specifically, Steelworkers in Canada are supporting a Bloc Quebecois and New Democratic Party (NDP) initiative to secure

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anti-scab legislation at the federal level.

Also on the Canadian front, our Union's historically strong organizing record of success is under threat. The laws in many jurisdictions are becoming increasingly hostile to the organizing activity of unions, thus interfering with workers' statutory right to organize. For example, in many jurisdictions, representation votes are now mandatory. In provinces where the law has changed to require mandatory votes (including Canada's industrial heartland of Ontario), our members have experienced an unprecedented number of aggressive anti-union campaigns in response to organizing efforts. We must continue to push governments in all of these jurisdictions to:

- ⇒ Restore the card-check-based certification system that operated for many years without amendment by governments of all political stripes.
- ⇒ Amend labour laws to give Labour Relations Boards the statutory authority to grant effective, expeditious and meaningful remedies for unfair labour practices, especially those committed during organizing campaigns.

Preserving Retirement Security

True retirement security requires preserving what our Union has always characterized as a "three-legged stool." In the United States, Social Security benefits are one leg; a good employer-provided pension is the second; and, savings and 401(k) plans are the third leg. In Canada, Old Age Security (OAS) is the first leg; Canada Pension Plan (CPP) is the second leg; and, savings, RRSPs and defined benefit pensions are the third leg.

In the United States, two of the legs underpinning this concept are now under attack. On one front, the Bush administration has launched an all-out campaign to privatize Social Security. On another, in the guise of solving the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's (PBGC's) short-term solvency issues, it is recommending radical changes to the pension system that will do fatal harm to defined benefit pensions — for workers and their employers alike.

In Canada, pensions are under attack in a different way. The failure to have a pan-Canadian pension guarantee fund has left defined benefit pension plan members vulnerable in the event of corporate bankruptcy. With less than 40 percent of the workforce covered by a defined benefit pension plan, we cannot lose sight of the importance of maintaining and improving OAS and CPP and CPP benefits.

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Defeating Privatization

Privatization has been a major weapon of right-wing governments on both sides of the Canadian-United States border for attacking worker and citizen rights.

In Canada, the main target of privatization has been the universal, not-for-profit, public health care system that has long benefited all Canadians. The Canadian public is clearly opposed to these privatization moves, but many federal politicians have stayed silent or have supported privatization, sometimes under the cover of "public-private partnerships." While the main target has been the health care system, privatization has also been implemented in public education and in the contracting out of basic public services.

In the United States, dismantling Social Security has been the goal of radical right-wing politicians and think tanks for decades. To achieve this goal now, the Bush administration has launched a campaign for privatizing the system by proclaiming the system is in crisis.

The fact that Social Security is solvent and will be until at least 2042, and that even after that it could continue to pay 73 percent of its obligations — even if no adjustments are made to strengthen the system — is completely ignored.

Also hidden from the public in the marketing of this phony "crisis" are these facts:

- ⇒ Privatizing Social Security will cost \$2 trillion in transition costs alone, effectively destroying the government's ability to support benefits as currently projected.
- ⇒ Wall Street will reap nearly a billion dollars a year in windfall profits from private accounts.
- ⇒ Seniors will have their benefits cut significantly if the Social Security Trust Fund is diminished by money being drawn into private accounts.
- ⇒ Citizens receiving disability and survivors' benefits under Social Security will have those benefits cut by more than 40 percent.
- ⇒ Using price indexing instead of wages to compute benefits, as some have advocated, will significantly reduce payments to Social Security recipients.

These dire consequences make it crucial that our Union take national leadership in defeating Social Security privatization, as we have in providing greater pension security over the years through passage of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA).

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Administration Attacks on Defined Benefit Pensions

While the Bush administration is breaking down the front door with its Social Security demands, it is invading through the back door as well. It is pushing a radical restructuring of the defined benefit pension system that would, among other things:

- ⇒ Tell workers at any company going into bankruptcy that they must immediately and automatically stop accruing pension service or benefits or higher guarantees from the PBGC.
- ⇒ Outlaw shutdown pensions at all companies, even if those programs have been in a pension agreement for decades.
- ⇒ Confront companies with new, untested, and dramatically more expensive contribution obligations.
- ⇒ For the first time ever, discriminate against companies with lower credit ratings by jacking up their required contributions even further.
- ⇒ Increase PBGC premiums by at least 57 percent and in many cases far more.
- ⇒ Handcuff employers with underfunded plans from implementing increases in pension multipliers or any other formula.

In fact, under a label of "saving" the defined benefit pension system, the administration's proposed changes will destroy it. Much like the Chicken Little "sky is falling" tactic being used on Social Security, the PBGC deficit is being used as an excuse to promote radical change to a system that has worked for years.

The cause of the PBGC deficit has been likened to the perfect storm — a massive drop in stock prices, low interest rates, and calamitous events in the steel and airline industries brought on by such causes as unfair trade and skyrocketing energy prices — none of which workers bear responsibility for.

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While some strengthening of the PBGC is necessary, none of these changes should wipe out defined benefit pensions and force employers into a purely defined contribution system, but that is the real agenda of the administration's proposal.

In Canada, one of our main challenges in the pension area is to establish a pan-Canadian pension guarantee fund. The need for such a fund has never been greater. Canadians participate in pension plans, such as defined benefit plans or multi-employer plans, with the expectation that they will receive the pension that they have been promised.

Unfortunately, due to bankruptcy, many workers are realizing that this is not so. Workers are having to come to grips with losing their job only to find out several months later that because their pension plan was underfunded, their pensions will have to be reduced. Clearly this is not acceptable.

We often think that pension plan underfunding and the possibility of benefit reductions will affect very few. The reality is that registered pension plans — and to a greater extent defined benefit pension plans — play an important role in the retirement needs of Canadians. As of January 1, 2002 just over 5.5 million Canadians — or about 40 percent of the total workforce — participated in registered pension plans. At the end of 2003, approximately 60 percent of defined benefit plans were underfunded with a combined actuarial liability of \$160 billion.

A pan-Canadian guarantee fund would ensure that the pension benefits for 4.5 million working Canadians and an unknown number of retired Canadians remains secure.

Establishing Principles for Restructuring Pensions

In the United States, our Union must work to ensure that any legislative restructuring of the pension system or changes to PBGC obligations hew to a clear set of principles that include:

Recognition that the defined benefit pension system has worked well for decades and needs to be strengthened, not radically altered.

Changes that must preserve the ways in which the defined benefit system encourages employers to offer this uniquely advantageous retirement vehicle.

The cost of addressing the PBGC deficit being spread equitably.

“Quality health care
is a right of every
citiz



- ⇒ Changes must avoid financial shocks to employers.
- ⇒ The right of collective bargaining to determine retirement benefits being preserved.
- ⇒ The PBGC must continue the crucial role of shouldering reasonable risks to keep the system viable.

In Canada, our Union must work to:

- ⇒ Win the "Workers First" Bill that would put workers first in terms of bankruptcy claims.
- ⇒ Establish a pan-Canadian pension benefit guarantee fund.
- ⇒ Ensure that the current structure of our universal Old Age Security (OAS) programs and our public Canada/Quebec Pension Plans (CPP/QPP) remain in place and are not "for sale."

Battling Unfair Trade

Like the fight to prevent destruction of defined benefit pensions, our ongoing struggle to combat unfair trade in both Canada and the United States must continue to be based on clear objectives. These include:

- ⇒ Defeating Fast Track Trade Authority.
- ⇒ Changing the Composition of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal (CITT) to include labor and community interests.
- ⇒ Having labor and broader citizen rights on par with corporate rights in all trade agreements, including NAFTA.
- ⇒ Reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- ⇒ Preventing United States and Canadian trade laws from being weakened in the Doha Round.
- ⇒ Leading the way in establishing a global network of unions and a common trade agenda.

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Several events in the coming years demand our activism to prevent global financiers and their allies from further undermining the rights of workers. We must strike at the heart of actions and institutions that perpetuate unfair trade by:

- ⇒ Defeating the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).
- ⇒ Defeating the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).
- ⇒ Demanding that the World Trade Organization (WTO) be restructured.
- ⇒ Demanding that China allow free trade unions, stop its exploitation of its own people and cease its manipulation of its currency.

Success in these struggles will go a long way toward reversing the staggering job losses in our industrial sectors and the global exploitation of workers that lie at the heart of unfair trade.

Winning Real Health Care Reform

Quality health care is a right of every citizen in both our nations, regardless of their economic situation. In both Canada and the United States, our Union has long embraced the principle of a universal, public, not-for-profit health care system. While our goals are common, our challenges are different.

In Canada, we need to continue to defend against underfunding, deregulation and privatization attacks on our universal, public, not-for-profit system. We need to also fight for our health care system to include drug coverage, long-term care, home care and dental and eye care.

Examples of recent struggles in Canada include:

- ⇒ In Alberta, the provincial government allowed the opening of private hospitals to perform hip operations. They skirted federal law by discharging patients without an overnight stay.
- ⇒ In British Columbia, the provincial government privatized ancillary services at most of the major hospitals.
- ⇒ In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario, the provincial governments allowed the private for-profit operation of clinics that provide MRIs and CAT scans.
- ⇒ In Quebec, the provincial government is preparing to open two super-hospitals under the public-private partnership model.

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Our members mobilized to make sure our voices were heard in the review of Canada's health system carried out by the Roy Romanow Royal Commission. We support the Romanow recommendations and will continue to fight the federal and provincial governments until they are fully implemented.

In the United States, our challenge is a different one. The United States is in a health care crisis, with skyrocketing costs, particularly for prescription drugs. In addition to the more than 45 million Americans without any health care insurance — millions of them children — workers who have negotiated coverage through their employers are suffering as employers attempt to saddle them with the brunt of runaway costs by imposing higher premiums and co-pays.

The Bush administration has no plan for providing health care coverage to the nation's children. Worse yet, the prescription drug plan for seniors passed by the administration is not only wrong-headed, it promises to heighten the crisis, for several reasons. The administration's plan:

- ⇒ Misrepresented the facts to Congress on its costs, preventing its own officials from revealing that the alleged \$400 billion cost was actually \$700 billion, much of which goes to the very drug companies that are creating runaway costs.
- ⇒ Directs billions of dollars in taxpayer funds to the pharmaceutical firms largely responsible for the runaway costs of prescription drugs.
- ⇒ Outlaws the government from negotiating bulk pricing for drugs as a means to hold down costs.

Our Union opposed the administration's misguided plan, and we will work actively to achieve real health care reform by:

- ⇒ Advocating repeal of the Bush plan and replacing it with a true prescription drug plan for seniors that includes the government's right to negotiate lower costs for bulk purchases.
- ⇒ Supporting legislation that creates a national system of health care for all United States residents 18 years of age and younger.
- ⇒ Proposing a federal risk insurance pool that will assume the catastrophic costs to businesses for health care expenditures in excess of \$50,000, contingent on the savings being passed on to workers in the form of lower premiums and/or co-pays.

We pledge to take these steps as part of a longer-term strategy of creating universal health care coverage in the United States similar to Canada's highly successful system.

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Rapid Response and SCAN

On both sides of the border, Steelworkers have the most effective legislative mobilization programs in the labor movement today. But the array of issues we face will challenge Rapid Response and SCAN as never before. We can be successful in these battles if our activists understand that:

- ⇒ The battles we engage are winnable.
- ⇒ We can win them through our activism.
- ⇒ All of our members must be engaged.

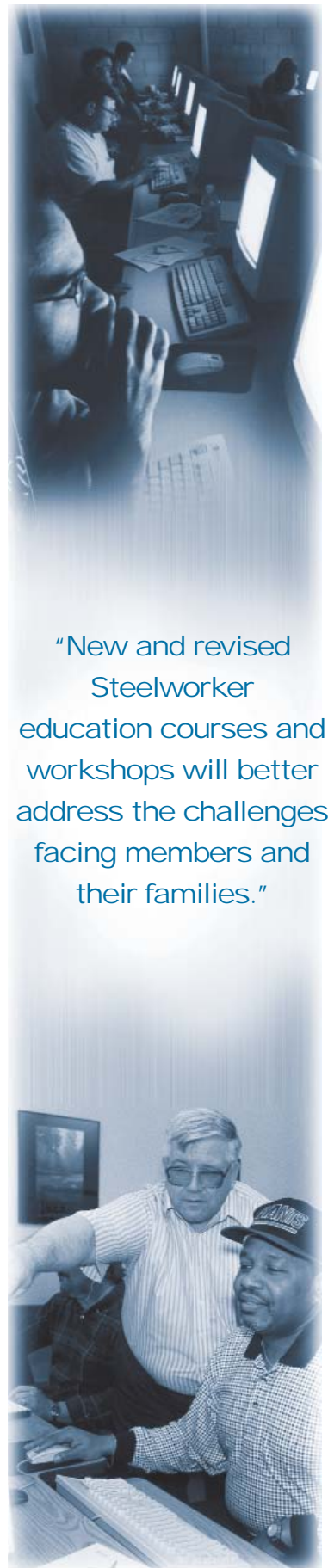
We urge all local union officers to ensure that their Rapid Response/SCAN teams are fully trained and committed for the battles ahead. We have learned through experience that it requires constant maintenance to keep mobilization teams effective at a high level. We need to ensure that our activists at all levels are committed and energized for the battles ahead.

Retooling Leadership Development

In both the United States and Canada, our Union has led the way in developing membership-based legislative and political activism. Our Union's Legislative Internship and Parliamentary Lobbyist programs have not only produced effective results, they have also proved to be highly successful ways of inspiring informed activism among our members.

In the United States, scores of our members have been educated through the Legislative Internship Program on the workings of the government, how to research and frame issues for presentation to Congress, and how to lobby forcefully on issues of concern to workers, both in the Capitol and in the congressional districts where they live and work.

Many of the program's graduates have become some of our Union's most formidable and persistent activists. The program is successful when its training can be applied to challenges facing members in their home districts.



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To strengthen the program, therefore, the program will be retooled to include:

- ⇒ One week of education on the methods and practices for mounting and managing strategic campaigns.
- ⇒ One month of education in Washington, D.C. on the skills and practical methods of lobbying Congress, both in the Capitol and in their home congressional districts.
- ⇒ Assignment to a four- to six-week project in a district program that provides the opportunity to implement the skills learned in their Internship training.

These improvements will strengthen a program that is already in the forefront of inspiring member activism.

In Canada, our work on the legislative front is continually evolving and expanding.

In addition to the day-to-day activities of maintaining Steelworker issues in the forefront on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, such as steel, softwood lumber, security issues, bankruptcy law and others, the Steelworker influence is making its way to the Provincial Legislatures as we launch our campaigns on labour law reform and post-secondary education funding at Queen's Park in Toronto.

Over 60 activists are trained federal lobbyists and have worked on the Westray, Steel Imports, Security and Bankruptcy campaigns. The success of our Westray campaign is testament to the determination of our local union lobbyists and our Union's staff.

The training of provincial lobbyists has begun and will soon expand into all provinces of Canada that will enable us to monitor both the federal and provincial activities. It is important that we maintain influence in both levels of government.

As our lobbyist training continues, a Parliamentary Internship program is near its final development that will bring provincial and federal lobby skills together with strategic and political skills.

"In both the U.S. and Canada, our Union has led the way in developing membership-based legislative and political activism."

Empowering Political Activism

Our effort in the 2004 election was unparalleled — over 4,600 Steelworkers actively engaged in communication with our members. But as good as it was, we can do better. To create a higher, more effective level of activism we need to train and regularly utilize a core group of activists within each local. The program will have the following elements:

- ⇒ Staff and local union officers will be trained first and will be called upon to recruit the other core local activists to be trained.
- ⇒ The schedule of training will be prioritized so that areas with key races this year and next are trained first.
- ⇒ Once trained, activists will be responsible for implementing various methods of communication within the jurisdiction of the local. The communication will take place now and will not wait until a race is in progress. The object will be to create a buzz within the local that will be centered around the strengths or deficiencies of specific incumbents.
- ⇒ Training modules will be standardized so that, over time, the number of persons able to do the training is increased exponentially.
- ⇒ In order to avoid the cyclical ups and downs of activity centered around federal races, greater attention will be given to state legislative and local races. School board elections are just as effective in developing local activists as Congressional races.
- ⇒ Develop and maintain a database of trained activists who will be rated for effectiveness.

In addition to training a core group of political activists within the local unions, we need to utilize technology and other state-of-the-art resources to:

- ⇒ Employ volunteers more efficiently in phone banking and home visits.
- ⇒ Refine our membership database and build our capability to communicate more strategically with subsets of our membership.
- ⇒ Engage and assist political activists through dedicated web sites and e-mail lists.

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Targeting Federal Elections

The need to elect public officials who will defend and advance workers' rights is crucial, especially in the face of the right-wing assault now underway. Races that will be targeted for active Steelworker involvement will include:

- ⇒ United States House races that were won/lost by ± 5 points and that have high member density.
- ⇒ United States Senate seats that are deemed winnable or that need protection from anti-worker candidates.
- ⇒ Gubernatorial races that are deemed winnable or that need protection.
- ⇒ Constituencies in Canada where there is a concentration of Steelworker membership.

Also, working with the AFL-CIO, referenda will be initiated at the state level on issues supportive of working families, such as increasing the minimum wage, restoring overtime pay for all workers, or requiring states to use state funds on in-state contractors.

Targeting State Races

To strengthen our defenses against the assault by anti-worker politicians, our Union must target a number of state legislative races for active involvement. These offices often control or directly influence initiatives such as right-to-work, overtime regulations and state contracts.

Furthermore, fewer resources are needed to win state races, and the density of Steelworker members in some state legislative districts makes it likelier that our Union's activism will prove decisive.

When politics are local, members are also more likely to become directly involved in the campaigns, as well as with local party politics and community organizations — a key step toward influencing the political parties.

With these changes and innovations, our Union will revolutionize the way in which we communicate with our members and encourage activism and fundraising to confront anti-labor and anti-worker challenges.



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Improving PAC Fundraising

In the United States, corporations now outspend labor in politics by a ratio of 19 to 1. Although unions may never match the donations of corporations, we can play a much larger role in financing political activism through our Political Action Committees (PACs).

By signing up every Steelworker member in the United States in our PAC check-off program for a minimum voluntary contribution of \$1.00 per week, we have the potential to raise in excess of \$15 million per year.

These contributions, coupled with the level of activism that we have already achieved, would allow us to protect our rights and win much needed legislation.

In order to accomplish our financial fundraising goals and make PAC fundraising an integral part of our Union's activism, we should:

- ⇒ Set a PAC fundraising goal of each member contributing a minimum of \$1.00 per week.
- ⇒ Identify locals without PAC check-off language and focus International staff on negotiating it in the next labor agreement.
- ⇒ Promote an annual PAC fundraising drive in each local of our Union.
- ⇒ Make a PAC presentation at conferences at every level of our Union.
- ⇒ Feature a legislative/PAC article in every local union newsletter.
- ⇒ Deliver a PAC report at every local union meeting.

In Canada, while our own polls and surveys suggest our members do not appreciate being told how to vote, they want to be involved in political action. In fact, most of our members surveyed would not only like to be involved, they would also be willing to make a financial contribution and would consider joining our political partner, the New Democratic Party. We just have to ask.

“In Canada, our members want to be involved in political action.”



Empowering Political Activism

New and revised Steelworker education courses and workshops will be designed to help better address the challenges facing members and their families with the political, organizing and equality goals of the Union. Developing a program to build power through political activism includes:

- ⇒ Updating materials on political education and the impact of political decisions on the lives of our members and families inside and outside of workplaces.
- ⇒ Educating and supporting workplace, local and regional SCAN coordinators.
- ⇒ Involving women's and human rights committees in SCAN and campaigns.
- ⇒ Ongoing promotion of individual members in SCAN.
- ⇒ Using SCAN to help communicate information and gather feedback from the membership on issue based and corporate campaigns.
- ⇒ Developing "Steelworkers Vote" workshops and materials to build the confidence of members to "talk politics" in the workplace and increasing the participation of Steelworkers in election campaigns at all levels in both the United States and Canada.
- ⇒ Bringing Steelworker members to the legislatures in both our countries through the link to Steelworker Lobbying programs.
- ⇒ Working together with the Canadian Labour Congress and the AFL-CIO to build activism at a municipal level and through Labour Councils to bring Steelworker voices into decisions that impact our members in their home communities.
- ⇒ Developing a kit to help activists promote membership in the New Democratic Party in Canada.
- ⇒ Identifying and supporting Steelworker candidates for election at every level of the political process.

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