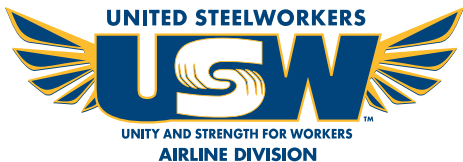


# **HANDBOOK FOR VOLUNTEER ORGANIZING COMMITTEE**



Contact a Steelworkers Organizer at:  
**1-877-855-8066**

or visit our web site at:  
**[www.usw.org/regionalelite](http://www.usw.org/regionalelite)**

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## OVERVIEW OF AN ORGANIZING CAMPAIGN

Your organizing campaign will be unlike any other. You, your fellow workers, your employer, your job, your supervisor – all are unique. Yet similarities are common to most organizing drives.

First and foremost, organizing is a people-to-people experience. That means everyone can play a role. Over your lifetime, you've developed an ability to work with people. That's the major skill you'll need to help organize your work place.

Second, employees organize *themselves* because they want to. Along the way, they seek out a full-time Union Organizer to coordinate their efforts. But it is the employees – the people themselves – who put the “drive” into an organizing drive. That's where the work of the Volunteer Organizing Committee (VOC) comes in.

As a member of a VOC, your job will be to help the USW Organizer focus employee energy

into steady progress toward Union certification by the Railway Labor Act, Mediation Board or other appropriate agency.

There's plenty of work for everyone. Issues must be identified, studied, and aired. Authorization cards must be obtained. Improper conduct by supervisors must be monitored. Once the campaign gets off the ground, an election petition must be filed. A bargaining unit must be determined. In many cases, a hearing will be held to establish an appropriate bargaining unit. The misinformation of the employer and its consultants must be answered. And, finally, an election will be held. Most of all, your message – the message for the Union – must get out. In all of this, you – as a member of the VOC – can help in countless ways.

This handbook walks you through the major stages of a Union campaign. The handbook spells out important legal protections you have. It tells you what you can expect to happen, things to watch for, and, most importantly, what you can do to make your organizing a success.

## THE KEY TO IDENTIFYING ISSUES: LISTENING

In your Committee activities – at every stage of the campaign – there is nothing so useful as carefully *listening* to your fellow employees. Only by listening can you build your campaign issues on the points people really care about.



You already know the simple magic of listening. As you and your fellow VOC members listen to employees, you begin to hear certain subjects come up over and over again. *These points are the building blocks of your campaign themes.*

One of the most important things you can do as a VOC member is to keep the USW Organizer up-to-date on the issues people really care about and are talking about. In this way, you help the Organizer to build a network of your co-workers and communications – that’s the heart and soul of organizing.

Once the campaign is underway, keep listening. You may be surprised how much people will tell you. They’ll explain to you what they like and don’t like about the employer and its campaign messages. They’ll do the same about the Union, too. By sharing this information with the USW Organizer and your fellow VOC members, you present a campaign that comes closest to employee needs.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR POSITIVE MESSAGE

Once you have developed a set of election issues, **PRESENT THEM AS POSITIVELY AS POSSIBLE. THEY ARE YOUR AFFIRMATIVE CASE FOR CHANGE.** Or to put it the other way, don't let the employer trick you into spending all your time just responding to management arguments.

During the campaign, the employer will try to move the debate off *your* issues. After all, your issues are what's organizing the employees. The employer will probably try to divert attention with "negative campaigning."

How should you respond? You must, of course, answer the employer's negative campaigning, and your USW Organizer will help you do that. But **NEVER** forget to put your positive case forward on the issues you know are important to your fellow workers. Bring the discussion back to those issues. Remember: *Your strongest arguments are your positive calls for improvement in the work place.* Continually,



make the debate center on your issues such as:

- an enforceable contract with your employer that defines the terms and conditions of employment;
- better wages and benefits;



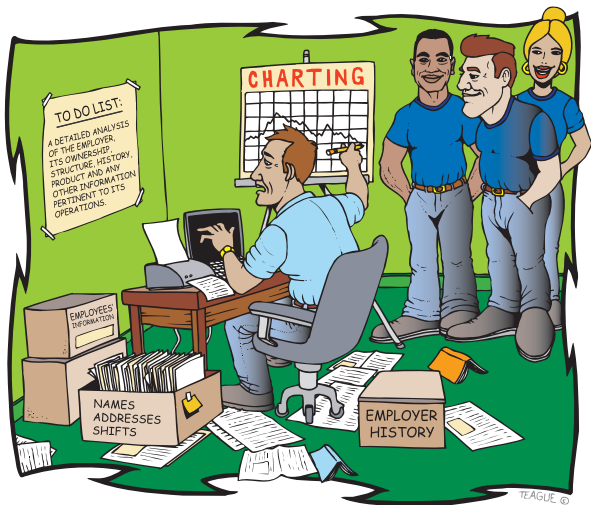
- ladders of training and promotion opportunity;
- the elimination of favoritism and personal preference by supervisors;
- a grievance procedure permitting workers to be heard and receive justice;
- respect for seniority in layoffs, promotions and other job changes;
- protection from discipline and discharge without just cause;
- affordable health care benefits; and
- proper staffing and job descriptions.

You may find some of these issues on everyone's list at your facility. Perhaps most important of all, a Union can give you a voice in determining your future in the work place, a right to express your opinions and concerns, and a right to say **NO** to managers when they are wrong.

## WHAT CAN A COMMITTEE MEMBER DO TO HELP?

**S**olid, careful and painstaking preparation is indispensable to effective organizing. Before a campaign is over, your VOC and the USW Organizer will need to know virtually everything about your work place. Under labor law, a great deal of technical information goes into establishing the “bargaining unit.” You can assist the USW Organizer with a wealth of basic information, such as:

- a detailed analysis of the employer, its ownership, structure, history, service performed or product manufactured, employee relations policies, and any other information pertinent to its operations;
- a layout of the work place, including a precise diagram of it;
- the nature of the work performed, the occupations involved, the kinds of equipment used and the number of work shifts;



- information concerning the employees to be organized, such as:
  - names, addresses, shifts, departments and telephone numbers;
  - past organizing efforts;
  - distribution of the work force by various departments, occupational groups, skills, etc.;
  - a breakdown by age, sex, race and ethnic groupings;

- special interests of the workers;
- employee rates of pay and benefits; and
- employee handbooks, if any, should be provided to the Organizer.

Once you have developed an accurate profile of the work force, you can tailor the Union's efforts to the precise interests of the group. The VOC serves as the eyes and ears of the organizing campaign within the work place, and should take note of the following:

- The **issues** the employees are concerned about, including the history behind them and the employer's position with regard to them;
- Determine which law firm or anti-Union "consultant," if any, represents the employer;
- Committee members should make notes, on their own time, of every questionable activity by supervision relating to the campaign. Some of the most common impermissible activities are listed on page 15. What you'll need to know are:

who, what, where, when and the names of witnesses to any such activity. This should be reported to the Organizer. The supervisor may be violating the law.

- Any other pertinent information which will help the USW Organizer serve the best interests of employees.

As the Committee is building, the USW Organizer will be gathering: 1) information from the Union's Research Department on the employer; 2) financial information on competitive firms with Union contracts; 3) contracts at other employers in the same business; and 4) any previous Union elections at your facility. The Organizer will also prepare a schedule of VOC meetings and education classes for VOC members. These will help you learn about labor law, anti-Union "consultants," management tactics and other matters coming up during the campaign.

A motivated and committed Committee is the most essential ingredient for a successful organizing campaign.

**ISSUES** to be used in the campaign are vital. They are the reason you seek a Union. They involve the crucial things that go on during working hours in the facility. Once you identify these concerns, the Organizer can work with you to frame the issues of special importance to **all employees**. Only by keeping **these issues** before the workers, do you keep the employer on the defensive.

## OBTAINING AUTHORIZATION CARDS

Our experience shows that the most effective method of collecting authorization cards is through the Volunteer Organizing Committee.

At first, members of the VOC should collect authorization cards from employees in their own group or department.

At this point in the campaign, the communication system should be working well. Each committee member should report to the Organizer the events involving both successful and unsuccessful solicitations of cards. In this way, VOC members continually educate the Organizer to the attitudes of the employees.

1. When signing up a new employee, make certain that the employee signs the card and it is properly dated.
2. VOC members should also initial cards as they see them signed or as they are handed to the VOC member by the signer.

Likewise, when the Organizer receives a card from a VOC member, he/she should also initial the card.

3. The VOC should continue to collect cards throughout the campaign with a goal of 100% as the target.

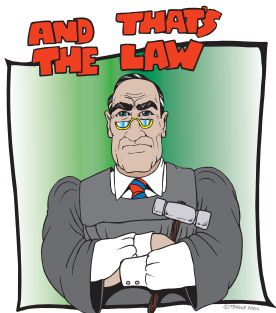
By far the best policy is to obtain authorization cards from a minimum of 60% to 65% of the entire unit *before* filing an election petition. Once a petition is filed, the Organizer will be busy with hearings, leaflets, mass meetings, etc. The collection of cards must be continued to build a “margin of safety” right up to the day of election.

After the election petition is filed, the performance of the VOC will make a big difference whether the election is won or lost. Lots of work is necessary. If the three essentials – education, communication and willingness to work – are present the organizing effort will be a success.



## EMPLOYEES RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

The Act protects the rights of employees to organize for purposes of collective bargaining without interference, restraint or coercion from carriers:



- Section 2, Third and Fourth of the Act says that employees may designate their representatives “without interference, influence or coercion” and carriers shall not in any way interfere with, influence, or coerce employees in their selection of a representative whether employed by a carrier or not.
- Section 2, Fifth prohibits carriers from requiring any person seeking employment to sign any contract or agreement promising to join or not to join a labor organization.

## THE RULES GOVERNING EMPLOYER (AND SUPERVISOR) CONDUCT

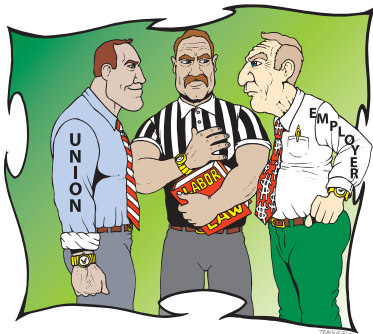
The U.S. Government polices Union representation campaigns to make sure they are free of unlawful threats or promises. If improper election conduct occurs, the National Mediation Board can order a rerun election, even if the objectionable conduct falls short of being a statutory violation. The election rules are strict. Many Committee members want to know exactly what supervisors can and cannot do under the law. The following is a list of what supervisors **CANNOT** do:

- Fire, discipline, transfer, reassign or harass workers for supporting the Union, or threaten to do so.
- Threaten workers or coerce them in an attempt to influence their vote.
- Threaten a Union supporter through a third party.
- Discipline pro-Union employees for a particular action and permit non-Union employees to go unpunished for the same action.

- Threaten employees with economic retaliation for participating in Union activities, including:
  - threatening to lay people off or close because of the Union; and
  - threatening to or taking away benefits you have if organizing a Union.
- Threaten to take away employee flight privileges.
- Tell employees overtime work (and premium pay) will be discontinued if the work place is Unionized.
- Transfer workers on the basis of Union affiliation or activity.
- Lay off employees in order to weaken the Union's strength or to discourage membership in the Union.
- Ask employees whether or not they belong to a Union or have signed up for a Union.

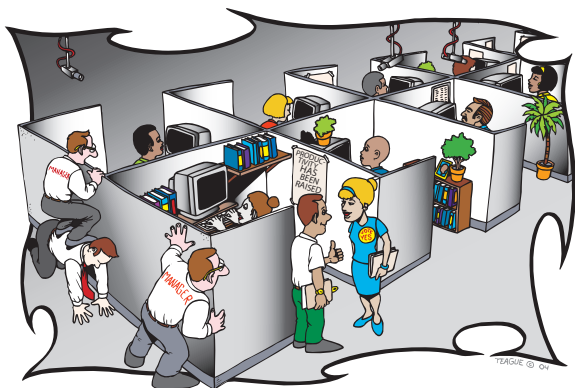
- Assign work in order to create conditions intended to get rid of an employee or cause undue hardship because of his or her Union activity.
- Deviate from employer policy for the purpose of getting rid of a Union supporter.

"I WANT A CLEAN FIGHT --  
NO REDUCTION IN BENEFITS...  
NO FACILITY CLOSURES ...  
NO DISMISSALS...NO LAYOFFS...  
AND, ABSOLUTELY, NO VIOLENCE!!!"



- Take actions to adversely affect an employee's job or pay rate because of Union activity.
- Promise or give employees promotions, raises or other benefits if they get out of the Union or refrain from joining it.
- Favor employees who don't support the Union over those who do in promotions, job assignments, wages, hours, enforcement of rules or any other working conditions.
- Ask what workers think about the Union, if they signed a Union card or how they intend to vote.
- Ask employees about confidential Union matters, meeting, etc. (Some employees may, of their own accord, tell of such matters. It is not an unfair labor practice to listen, but to ask questions to obtain additional information is illegal.)
- Announce that the employer will not deal with a Union.

- Ask an employee, during a hiring interview, about his or her affiliation with a labor organization.
- Spy on or claiming to spy on Union meetings, including parking across from the Union hall to see which employees enter the hall, and engaging in any undercover activity that would indicate that employees are being kept under surveillance to determine who is and who is not supporting the Union.
- Provide financial support to those not supporting the Union or giving financial support or assistance to a Union or to employees, regardless of whether or not they are supportive of the Union.
- Start a petition or circular against the Union or encourage or take part in its circulation if started by employees.
- Urge employees to try to induce others to oppose the Union or keep out of it.

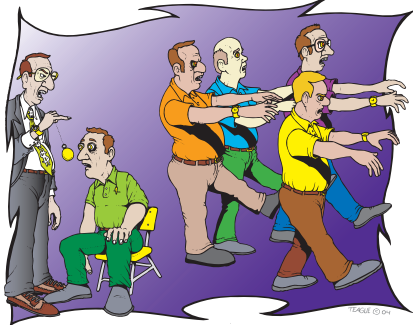


- Bar employee Union representatives from soliciting employee memberships during non-working hours.
- Make anti-Union statements or taking other actions that might show preference for a non-Union employee.
- Become involved in arguments that may lead to a physical encounter with an employee over the Union question.
- Team up non-Union employees and keep them apart from supporters of a Union.

- Engage in any other discriminatory action against Union supporters, or in favor of those not supporting the Union.

If your supervisor does any of these things, your rights are being violated. These are the most common things to watch for. As an employee and supporter of the Trade Union movement, you should report any of these acts to your VOC as soon as they happen.

**"YOU'RE GETTING SLEEPY . . . NOW REPEAT AFTER ME -- THE UNION IS BAD . . . THE UNION IS BAD . . ."**





## ANTI-UNION CONSULTANTS

During the course of your organizing campaign, the chances are good that your employer will campaign according to strategies and methods developed by an “anti-Union consultant.” AFL-CIO statistics indicate that anti-Union “consultants” are now active in approximately 75% of all Union campaigns. These consultants make a full time and very profitable profession of fighting organizing campaigns. They will stop at nothing and may even counsel an employer to break the law. Fortunately, there is a growing body of knowledge on how to counter the “anti-union consultants.”

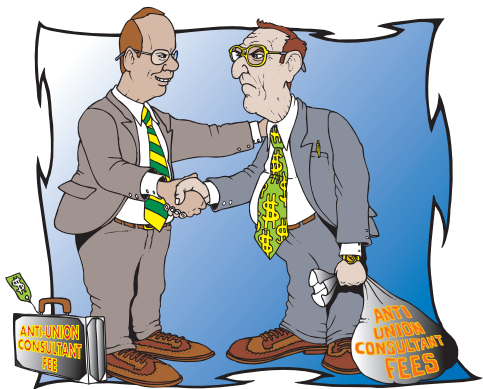
You and your fellow VOC members should work with your USW Organizer to prepare yourselves for the strategies and tactics used by anti-Union consultants. They often bring a good deal of expensive gimmickry to the employer’s campaigns: polls, psychological techniques, direct mail and a large assortment of printed matter – all of it designed to talk employees out of uniting together in a Union to improve their jobs.

It is, of course, impossible to predict exactly what a consultant will bring to our campaign. Different consultants use different styles and they usually fall somewhere between two extremes.

In one camp are the consultants who recommend “hardball.” They train supervisors and managers to threaten discipline for Union supporters and they try to associate the Union with a constant stream of negativity. For example, they barrage your fellow employees with reports about strikes, never bothering to mention over 98% of contracts are settled without a strike, and that you will never strike as a Steelworker unless a majority of you and your co-workers vote to do so.

In another camp are the consultants who train your supervisors to “love the Union to death.” Suddenly, your supervisor begins to show interest in you, your children and what you did last weekend.

Still another group of consultants bring a mix of both the “hardball” and “love” strategies with an added twist: the employer *admits* it has



mistreated its employees but begs you to give them “one more chance.”

Get your VOC together with the USW Organizer and learn about these techniques. The sooner you do this, the more skillfully you can predict the likely impact of these strategies on your fellow employees, the better you can plan the handling of your issues and the faster you can counter the company’s steps.

Ordinarily, supervisors are encouraged by anti-Union consultants to, as the consultants put

it, do three things: communicate, communicate and communicate.

The advice makes sense. Employers have access to their employees as a captive audience for eight hours at a time. Compared to the Union Organizer, the employer has a far greater



opportunity to flood employees with communications: one-on-one conversations, pamphlets, speeches and video presentations.

Obviously, the USW Organizer cannot be there at every one of these occasions to present the other side. But you, the VOC member, play a critical role in the campaign because you are in the work place. A big job, therefore, falls on your shoulders: to be at the job site working to remind your fellow employees of the positive improvements a Union can bring.

If you were to assemble a group of experienced organizers and ask them to discuss consultants, most of them would have the following observations:

1. The average employee will seldom, if ever, see or hear the consultant. They work behind the scenes so that it looks as if your employer is dealing with you on his or her own.
2. Consultants work through *supervisors*. They intensively train and indoctrinate supervisors to act strictly according to the consultant's instructions.
3. Consultants often urge supervisors to pound one message into employees over and over again. This is it: "If you Unionize, you could lose some of your benefits, be forced to go on strike and lose your income." Consultants coordinate a concerted effort to arouse and inflame the employee's natural fear of the unknown.
4. In its communications, consultants coach the company to attack the Union's

constitution on: 1) the salaries of Union officers and employees; 2) Union fines and the Union's internal trial procedures; 3) dues; and 4) "outside International control."

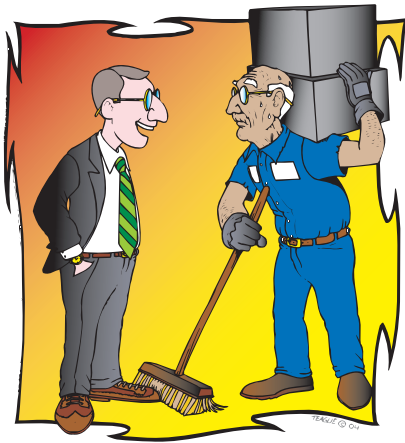
5. Consultants recommend that employers skirt the very borderline for the law with phrases like, "we'll have to bargain everything from scratch; you may lose benefits; the plant may close or relocate; or there will be cutbacks or layoffs."
6. Through it all, the Union is portrayed as a group of outsiders who are just after your dues money.

If these tactics are ever to be effective, it is because they serve one overriding purpose: to divert attention from the issues that you and your fellow employees have raised.

**Remember:** The consultant is a mercenary, a hired gun. His/her stock in trade is fear and confusion. Your task is to be better trained, more knowledgeable about your work place, more persuasive, more credible and, most

important, more respected than the employer's representatives. It takes work, but the rewards are great.

**YOU DON'T NEED A UNION!**



## IDENTIFYING CONSULTANTS

It is important to the campaign to find out early if the employer will be using an anti-Union consultant. Certain signs may become apparent and you should watch for and report them to the Organizer:

- Management and foremen attending meetings not normally held;
- Management talking one-on-one to employees involved in the campaign;
- Rental cars in the office parking lot (consultants are usually from out of town);
- The employer conducting a survey; and
- A change in attitude by management.



# FACTS ABOUT INITIATION FEES, DUES, ASSESSMENTS AND FINES

## Initiation Fees

In the USW, the normal initiation fee is a one-time charge of \$10. But, there will be NO initiation fee whatsoever for newly organized employees.

## No Contract/No Dues

There will be no dues paid by anyone until after a contract has been negotiated and approved by a majority of you and your co-workers.

Monthly dues are 1.45% of total earnings. Dues are divided as follows:

- 44% to your Local Union – Your Local Union spends its money according to your priorities. This money can help pay for the administration of Local Union affairs, collective bargaining, member education programs, arbitration and sending delegates

to important conferences and the USW Constitutional Conventions.

- 44% to your International Union – This money funds the general operations of the Union. It pays for the salaries of expert staff and support staff, and the special departments that support your Local Union. (Please see page 47 for a description of the USW departments.)
- 7% to the Strike and Defense Fund – A strong Strike and Defense Fund gives you influence and respect at the bargaining table. While strikes in the Steelworkers are rare, the Strike and Defense Fund is there to help members get by if needed.
- 3% to Organizing – This money helps ensure our Union has the resources to help bring the benefits of the Steelworkers to new members. In addition, at the 1998 USW Constitutional Convention, delegates voted to further strengthen organizing efforts through a 2 cents per hour dues.

- 1% to Education – In order for members to have the skills needed to properly take care of their interests, courses on collective bargaining, labor law, Local Union leadership, health and safety, human rights, women's issues and many other topics are available to all members.
- 1% to Political and Legislative Action – This portion of your dues helps the USW take a stand on government policies that affect working people, their jobs, their economic security, their retirement and issues of social justice.

## WHO CONTROLS THE LEVEL OF DUES? YOU, THE MEMBERSHIP

Dues are set democratically at the USW Constitutional Convention by delegates from your Local Union and others. As a Union member, you help oversee how your dues are set and how they are administered.

### Assessments

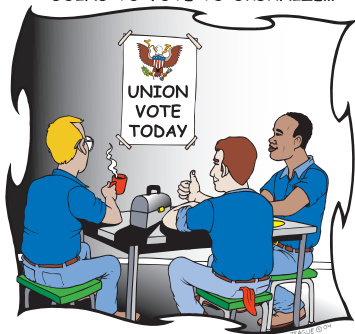
Since the formation of the Strike and Defense Fund in 1968, there has never been a single so-called “assessment.”

### Fines

In the past 40 years, not a single member of the Steelworkers has been fined by the International Union. Documents proving this fact are filed within the U.S. government and open to public inspection at any time.

Union representation elections for employees are conducted by the U.S. Government and guarantee your right to a secret ballot vote.

"CAN YOU BELIEVE AFTER ALL THIS TIME, WE ARE FINALLY GOING TO VOTE TO ORGANIZE!!!"



## PROCESS FOR SECURING REPRESENTATION

### *NMB Conducts Elections*

- NMB defines the craft/class of employees eligible to vote extending to all employees

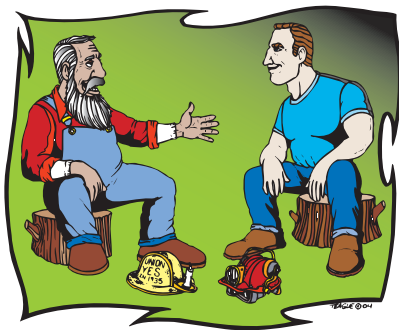
performing a particular job function throughout the company's operations, not at a particular site or region.

- Union must produce authorization cards or other proof of support from at least 35% of the craft or class if not represented; and 50% + 1 if employees are represented.
- RLA requires that the Union receive a majority of votes from the craft or class members who cast ballots.
- RLA contains no unfair labor practice procedures; however, the NMB is required to insure the choice of representatives without interference or coercion by the carrier and can decide to run another election if it finds that carriers conduct violated the obligations under Section 2.
- RLA ensures employees right to vote in a secret ballot election. No one can vote twice.

## HISTORY OF THE USW

The USW originally grew out of the mass production organizing efforts initiated in 1935 by United Mine Workers' President John L. Lewis and a group of other American Federation of Labor (AFL) leaders. They formed the Committee for Industrial Organization, later the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

Under an agreement with the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (organized in 1876), Philip Murray established the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and launched a massive



organizing drive throughout the industry in June, 1936, with the assistance of the CIO.

Within six years, membership growth and collective bargaining progress led to the formation of an autonomous International Union at a constitutional convention held in Cleveland, Ohio. At that time, SWOC was disbanded and the Union became the United Steelworkers of America, CIO on May 22, 1942.

The United Steelworkers is a strong Union with enormous resources available to its membership. Its strength comes from the service it renders to its members. A Union's value to its members is directly proportional to the service and security it can provide.



## A DIVERSIFIED UNION

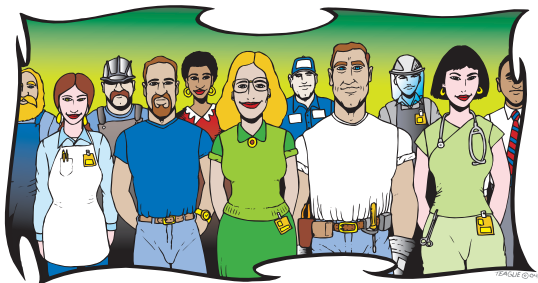
The USW represents workers in many areas: steel; can; nonferrous; mining; aluminum; fabricating; chemical; rubber and plastics; retail stores; shipbuilding; quarries; airlines; bus and taxi drivers; supermarkets; upholstery; utilities; education; construction; health care; clerical, technical and professional workers; public employees; paper and forestry; manufacturing; and energy.

The USW currently has 850,000 members. Most of our contracts contain pension; life insurance; medical insurance; vacation pay; holiday pay; job descriptions and classifications; safety and health provisions; seniority; grievance and arbitration procedures; and job bidding.

The USW is governed by the USW Constitution. The USW meets every three years at a Constitutional Convention. Delegates to the Convention are elected from Local Unions.

Resolutions to change the Constitution are submitted by Local Unions and voted on by

delegates. Union dues are determined by vote of delegates. The Officers and Executive Board of the International Union are elected every four years by the members, and Local Unions elect their officers every three years.



## SERVICES OF THE USW

Here are some of the services provided to the members of the United Steelworkers:

### Field Staff

The USW Staff Representatives are the backbone of the organization providing help and assistance to the Local Unions. Each Local has a staff representative assigned to it to help negotiate that first important contract and then make sure management interprets that contract correctly. In addition, there are numerous departments at the International Headquarters that specialize in assisting the field staff and Local Unions.

### Legislative Department

*Primary Function:* To present Steelworker views to Members of Congress, state legislatures, and federal and provincial parliaments. To inform members of proposed legislation affecting their interests. (Example: The Union will present its experts to appear and testify before Congressional committees on legislation of vital interest to working people, OSHA, the government agency responsible for safety

and health in the work place; ERISA, which provides for pension plan protection; and the Railway Labor Act, Mediation Board.)

### **Corporate Research Department**

*Primary Function:* To provide research on corporate financial data. (Example: Prior to negotiating with an employer for wages and benefits, the Research Department provides information on industrial and corporate trends, import and export of goods, technology affecting our members, etc.)

### **Membership Development Department**

*Primary Function:* To educate and inform Local Union activists so they have the skills needed to represent the membership successfully. (Example: the Education Department trains Local Union representatives on how to implement their grievance and arbitration procedure successfully.)

### **Pension and Benefits Department**

*Primary Function:* To assist the staff and membership in negotiating and administering quality programs for health insurance and pensions. (Example: This group assures that

pension and insurance are correctly negotiated and then explained to the membership in simple, understandable form.)

## **Arbitration and Contracts Department**

*Primary Function:* To assist staff in negotiating and implementing grievance and arbitration provisions in USW contracts. Also, maintain the thousands of USW contracts. (Example: One major corporation tried to eliminate the jobs of our electrical/electronic repairmen members by contracting out their work. In a landmark case, our Arbitration Department won a decision preventing this elimination of our members' jobs.)

## **Collective Bargaining Services Department**

*Primary Function:* To provide support and technical expertise to field staff and Local Unions in collective bargaining, worker participation, wage, incentives, apprenticeship and office, technical and professional matters. (Example: Incentive and bonus programs require union representative monitoring.)

## **Civil Rights Department**

*Primary Function:* To provide technical expertise in handling discrimination situations, and conduct education and training seminars on civil rights and women's rights.

## **Women of Steel Program**

*Primary Function:* To educate women about the Union, promote activism and leadership among women in the Union, and support women's committees within Local Unions.

## **Legal Department**

*Primary Function:* To assure that staff and Local Unions in each district have necessary legal assistance. One former General Counsel of the USW served as a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

## **Health, Safety and Environment Department**

*Primary Function:* To assist in negotiating and enforcing safety and health provisions in our contracts, so that our members can enjoy a safe and healthy work place. To assist Local Unions in identifying safety hazards, carcinogenic substances and toxic materials.

## **Communications Department**

*Primary Function:* To communicate to both the membership and the public about the goals and objectives of the Union. (Example: The monthly USW magazine *USW@Work* goes to over 900,000 active and retired members in the U.S. and Canada.)

## **Rapid Response Department**

*Primary Function:* To provide current information to USW members via faxes on issues that could affect them or their livelihood. Rapid Response is a network that recruits at least 4% of the members of a Local Union to be team members and then trains them on how to educate their co-workers. It allows our members an avenue to make their voice heard through venues such as a toll-free phone call or personal letter to a legislator.