Building Power
Taking Action: Education and Equality

United Steelworkers National Policy Conference
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On the cover: Mandeep Kaur participates in a USW education course

Inside: Celebrating International Women's Day, 2010
Building Power: Back to the Locals Education Program

The Steelworkers Education Program helps our members to understand the current context in which we work, and to explain the effects that politics, the global economy and corporate globalization have on our workplaces and the union. It is the foundation that extends our reach beyond the classroom to build a stronger union presence in our workplaces and broaden union participation at all levels.

Education gives members the necessary competence and the confidence to effectively represent Steelworkers and the labour movement across the country. Our education program has touched over 15,000 members in Montreal, Labrador City, Thompson, Kimberley and many other places across Canada. That number includes more than 150 newly trained and/or upgraded Back to the Locals instructors who have taken time away from their local unions and their families to make the education program work. We are proud of our talented group of instructors and are working to ensure that they continue to reflect our membership in all its diversity.

Taking action is the basis for our education program. USW courses recognize that our members are the link between resolving specific workplace issues and the broader goal of shaping public policies for a worker-friendly environment. We are only meeting half of our objectives if education does not lead to action. Course participants are encouraged to identify ways to put their learning into practice and change things for the better.

Steelworkers Education Program advantages

- USW training courses:
  - Are delivered in workplaces,
  - Are paid for by employers,
  - Allow our education program to reach members who may have little experience or understanding of the wider role Steelworkers play outside their own workplace,
  - Enable us to create healthier and more respectful workplaces by teaching the maximum number of members and non-members how to prevent and deal with harassment in the workplace.

- The education program offers courses regionally which:
  - Are cost effective for local unions,
  - Allow members to participate with the least negative impact on their family life and local union commitments.
More intensive courses are offered in a residential format, allowing participants to focus on the course material for a better educational experience.

The education program continually updates existing courses to provide members with the most current information and to reflect the latest changes in the legal and regulatory environment. In addition, new courses are being developed to deal with emerging issues and new legislation.

The “Steelworker training Steelworker” approach of our education program is one of its biggest assets. It ensures that:

- Participants and instructors are connected by shared experience,
- Instructors understand the union,
- USW activists who have benefited from union education have an opportunity to “pay back” some of their good fortune by sharing their knowledge and experience with other Steelworkers.

Connecting education with the union’s strategic goals

Since 2007, the following new initiatives were completed in addition to our ongoing work:

- Course materials were revised and updated to produce new resources for use in the classroom and the workplace.
- Instructors were trained, coached and upgraded.
- In addition to their knowledge and experience, our training programs ensured that USW instructors and activists reflect the diversity found in our union’s membership today and will continue to do so in the future.

New materials and workshops were introduced to build instructors’ and members’ confidence to “talk union and politics” inside and outside our workplaces and create a membership that is truly organized and mobilized.

An equality “lens” was and continues to be built into each of our courses.

Steps to Building Power: USW courses

Whether it’s learning how to file a grievance, protecting health and safety, or getting more people involved in our union, Steelworker Education has the knowledge members need and the courses to make it available. Contact your District Education Coordinator for more information about courses like:

- You And Your Union
- Local Union Officers/Chairpersons Training
- Financial Officers Training
- Steelworker Stewards In Action
- Protecting Our Health, Safety And Environment
- Workers’ Compensation
- Confidence with Conflict
- Human Rights Are Workers’ Rights
- The Duty to Accommodate
- Arbitration Series
- Confronting Workplace Change: Continuous Bargaining Strategies
- Bargaining To Win
- Bargaining Pensions
- Leadership For Action
- Organizing
While all Steelworker courses include sections and discussions on human rights issues, there are specific courses designed for union members to focus on equality. These are:

- **Steelworker Literacy: Keep It Clear**
- **Building Power**
- **Building Strong Locals: Time To Fight Back**
- **Take The Next Step: Changing The Face Of Politics**
- **Globalization And International Solidarity**
- **Women Of Steel Leadership Development**
- **Women’s Committees: Building Local Union Power**
- **Instructor Training**
- **Union Counselling**

**Using equality to achieve solidarity**

The USW has adopted strong policies to achieve equality in our workplaces and through our laws. At International Conventions and Canadian Policy Conferences, delegates have debated and passed resolutions and policy statements on preventing harassment, fighting racism, discrimination and homophobia, balancing work and family responsibilities, pay equity, accommodating people with disabilities, and working in coalition with groups locally, nationally and internationally to raise awareness and protect human rights.
Women, people of colour, people living with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members can see themselves reflected in a variety of ways throughout the union and its work with community and labour partners. For members of equity-seeking groups, the union has developed resources like *Step-by-Step to Elected Office: A Steelworker Affirmative Action Guide to Local Union Elections*.

In addition to using equality to build solidarity within our own union, we also participate with other allies in the labour movement. Most notably, at the CLC, we are part of various working groups and committees, including the CLC Human Rights Committee, the Women’s Committee, and both the Aboriginal Workers and Workers of Colour working groups. At a more strategic level, the Steelworkers are involved in the CLC Taskforce for the Equity Audit and the Anti-Racism Survey, both of which will promote greater diversity in the labour movement. In addition, to ensuring diversity in labour education, we are a key part of the Design Group for the CLC Course Designer Training Project.

Steelworkers are represented on equality committees at some level in provincial labour federations. For example, in 2009, Steelworkers on the Visible Minority Terminology Working Group consulted and helped change equality terminology in the OFL Constitution.

Conferences give our activists a valuable opportunity to inspire each other, to learn more, and to network. Important equality conferences and events in recent years included the National Women’s Conference in 2008 in Vancouver, and National Human Rights Roundtable in 2009. In addition, Canadian Steelworkers took part
as delegates, instructors and speakers at the USW 15th International Civil and Human Rights Conference in Pittsburgh.

The United Steelworkers was one of the first unions to recognize and promote International Women’s Day (March 8), the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21), Aboriginal Persons’ Day (June 21), Pride Days, Labour Day, World AIDS Day (December 1), as well as an interfaith calendar of special days. We continue to reach out and form strategic alliances to help promote Aboriginal rights and anti-racism initiatives.

**Promoting equality by preventing and dealing with harassment**

One of the most successful initiatives in promoting equality and human rights has been the United Steelworkers Anti-Harassment Program. The Program began with a single workshop, Preventing and Dealing with Harassment in the Workplace. By 2007, over 40,000 people across Canada had received human rights training.

In 2008, Dealing with Cultural Diversity in the Workplace was added to recognize the rapid increase in diversity amongst our membership in their workplaces.
With the expansion of the Anti-Harassment Program to meet the needs of today's diverse workforce, we anticipate more human rights activism at the heart of solidarity – our workplaces.

**Women of Steel**

In 1990, the union held its first *Women of Steel* education course to encourage the development of leadership skills and the participation of women in the union. Today, the district and national women’s committees are also there to further promote women’s participation in the union’s many programs. Our international constitution also requires every local union to establish a women’s committee. A new course has been developed to help locals accomplish this objective.

In 2008, USW held its National Women’s Conference in Vancouver, bringing together Steelworker activists, labour strategic allies such as ACTRA and other unions to share strategies and hold an equality protest in the streets of Vancouver.

**Pride at Work**

Currently, Pride committees representing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers, are being formed to educate the membership, fight for equity in the workplace and encourage activism. The union is actively reviewing collective agreement language in our contracts to ensure that the rights of LGBT members are protected.

**Disability rights**

Steelworker local human rights committees and joint workplace committees continue to identify ways to better accommodate workers living with disabilities. The union is working with our partners in the community to remove all barriers to full participation in employment and activism in the union. The Steelworkers Opening Doors policy is a guide to local unions to help advance the rights of people living with disabilities.

**The Balancing Act**

Responding to changing family structures, increasing responsibilities at home, an aging population, and greater participation by women in the workforce, the United Steelworkers developed unique policies to help workers balance work, family and union activity. Through contract language, local union by-laws and political action, the diverse needs of our members can be addressed.

**Securing the next step**

There is always more the union can do to ensure that its members have everything they need to organize, bargain the best possible contracts, and work together for change. Steelworker Education and Equality builds on past successes and will continue building on the three steps that continue to move us forward – solidarity in the workplace, solidarity in union, and solidarity in the community, both locally and globally.

For more information about Steelworker education and equality policies, please visit the Steelworkers website ([www.usw.ca](http://www.usw.ca)), or contact your District Office, Local Union/Regional Education Committee or District Education Coordinator.
EN 2010, ÇA VA MARCHER !

Le Collectif 8 mars : 

Huguette Latulippe / Promotion inc., Illustration : Geneviève Guénette, Graphisme : Michele Lapointe

Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) International Women’s Day poster, 2010