

STEELWORKERS EQUALITY AGENDA

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

In Canada, one in five children lives in poverty. Women earn 60 cents for every dollar earned by men, and over 50 per cent of older women live in poverty. Visible minority persons earn 30 per cent less than white people. People of colour are 2.3 times more likely to live in poverty than whites. People with disabilities experience staggering levels of underemployment and unemployment.

Globally, the picture is no better. Over one half of the world's population lives on two dollars a day or less. More than one billion people are living on less than one dollar a day. The world's 225 billionaires together own **\$1 trillion**. Their wealth is equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 per cent of the world's population: **225 individuals have the wealth of 3 billion poor people.**

Despite calls by international aid and development agencies, governments have done little to address global poverty.

Human rights are workers' rights

The United Steelworkers 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 and discrimination, balancing work and family responsibilities, closing the wage gap, accommodating people with disabilities, and working in coalition with groups locally, nationally and internationally to raise awareness and protect human rights.

Changes in the workforce have demanded that unions remain representative and responsive. By applying the principles of equality, justice, dignity and respect within the union, the United Steelworkers has promoted human rights since its beginning. Steelworkers understand that everyone is entitled to the same rights and freedoms, regardless of race, religion, gender, age or sexual orientation.

There is strength in diversity but it starts with respect and understanding of people's differences.



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Steelworkers: Equality at Work



The United Steelworkers is the most diverse union in Canada. We represent working people across the country.

From underground miners to university technical and support staff; from the highest-paid industrial workers in Canada to workers in the security industry who joined our union to escape the minimum wage trap.

From second-and-third-generation Steelworkers, who literally grew up in our union, to the thousands of immigrants to Canada who turn to our union to give meaning to their dream of a better life in this country.

I am proud of what our union has become and I hope you feel the same. You are what our union has become and are part of our evolution. You are building the Steelworkers union of the future.

We have built our union by expanding beyond our “traditional industries” and embracing new challenges. We have welcomed call centre workers, security officers, restaurant and hotel employees, and health care staff to our union. We have brought the benefits of union membership to those who need it most. We continue to organize the unorganized.

We have built our union by strengthening and deepening our commitment to equality and broader social change.

We are proud of our direct involvement in Canada’s social democratic movement. We are proud of our engagement with the community around us. We don’t just talk social unionism. **WE LIVE IT.**

Ken Neumann
National Director for Canada
United Steelworkers

Achieving equality

The United Steelworkers represents workers in virtually every economic sector, from coast-to-coast-to-coast. The best way for workers to close the wage gap and address issues of harassment and discrimination in the workplace is to join and get active in a union.

Steelworkers developed **SES: A Simple Effective Solution to Pay Equity and Job Evaluation** to address the historic inequities caused by the undervaluing of elements in women’s work. The union has also negotiated precedent-setting employment equity language for aboriginal employees.

Specific conferences and policies on workers’ compensation and health and safety have raised awareness of what the union can do to effectively accommodate injured workers and workers with disabilities.

Challenging harassment

The **Steelworkers Anti-Harassment Policy**, or “Yellow Sheet,” read at every Union event states clearly the position that harassment strikes at the heart of principles fundamental to the labour movement: human rights and solidarity. Policies, procedures and training help to ensure members have the skills to identify workplace and union practices that may be discriminatory or act as barriers to women, visible minority persons, people with disabilities and aboriginal people.

The **Steelworkers Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program** has reached over 40,000 front-line workers and managers. The program, delivered during work time in the workplace, helps to raise awareness and build the confidence of workers to prevent and deal with incidents of harassment and discriminatory behaviour. A network of trained Steelworker facilitators and counsellors deliver the anti-harassment training as well as provide support to help mediate human rights based conflicts in the workplace and in the union.

The union's Constitution requires every local to set up a Human Rights Committee. The Steelworker Human Rights Committee Guide has been developed to help committees run effectively and meet their goals and objectives.

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.

Equality through education

In 1990, the Steelworkers introduced the **Women of Steel** course to encourage the participation of women in the union. The involvement of women from different communities and industries has benefited the union, allowing the Steelworkers to develop strong policies and programs. Women of Steel are making a difference in their workplaces, communities and in the union.

The union's Constitution now requires every local union to set up a women's committee. A new course, "Women's committees: Building Local Union Power", helps locals set up effective and vibrant committees.

While all Steelworker courses include sections and discussions on human rights issues, there are specific courses designed for union members to focus on these areas: human rights are workers' rights; the duty to accommodate; globalization and international solidarity; and women of steel.

Pride at Work

Currently, Pride committees, representing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (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

At the 2006 National Disability Rights Conference, Steelworkers committed 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.

Internal democracy

Democracy in the Steelworkers is a source of great pride in the membership. Every three years, members elect local officers and committees. Every four years, every member has a vote in the election of the International Officers, Canadian National Director and District Directors.

One member, one vote means that every member has an opportunity to elect Steelworker leadership. For members of equity-seeking groups, this aspect of internal democracy is important. Allowing every member a vote provides for their participation in the election process and ensures the accountability of candidates and elected leadership to the membership as a whole.

Human rights and women's committees ensure that resources and support are available to women, visible minority members and other members of equity-seeking groups who are interested in running for elected office in the Steelworkers. **Step-by-Step to Elected Office: A Steelworker Affirmative Action Guide to Local Union Elections** provides activists with descriptions of each position and tips on how to run a successful campaign.



A tool for global solidarity

Through the **Steelworkers Humanity Fund**, Canadian Steelworkers have linked with unions and community groups in countries around the world. Workers are discovering new ways to connect, share information and forge joint strategies to address common problems.

Joint campaigns have helped raise awareness of events like the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the World March of Women. Local and regional events on International Women's Day (March 8), the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21), Aboriginal Persons' Day (June 21), Pride Days and Labour Day are opportunities to celebrate our successes and lobby governments where globalization and the corporate agenda threaten working people.



Taking action

As Steelworkers, we work with progressive community groups and our political partners every day to advance human, economic and social rights. We can be proud of our work together because it has improved the lives of workers and their families.



Our union has been one of the labour movement's strongest champions of social democracy. Our political partners, the New Democratic Party and the Parti Québécois share our commitment to workers' and human rights. Now more than ever, we need a strong voice to stand up for justice, dignity and respect.

We must continue to work together – making gains on the shop floor and in the legislatures.

Everybody's Union

Steelworkers' Human Rights and Women's Committees, Area Council and Local Committees work with union members and our social and political partners to advance efforts in our workplaces and in our communities to fight discrimination, harassment and inequality.

Union activists are human rights activists. Together, in solidarity, we continue to build power and take action. strengthen **Everybody's Union**.

