Training, Retraining and Career Development

WHEREAS, continuing education and training provide our members with tools crucial for adapting to the changing economy and the changing environment of work; and

WHEREAS, in the United States we have negotiated with the major steel companies, most major tire manufacturers and other employers the Institute for Career Development (ICD), which offers members employer-funded training and counseling in life and employment skills and which has proven so popular with our members that, in 2006 alone, nearly 15,000 Steelworkers enrolled in ICD-sponsored classes, and in 2007, more than 2,000 customized courses were offered to Steelworkers in local learning centers; and

WHEREAS, the ICD has made significant inroads in establishing this training opportunity in the tire and rubber industry to the extent that in the past three years 25 career development sites have been oriented to career development; and

WHEREAS, the ICD works with its 72 career development sites in the U.S. to enrich the lives of Steelworkers by administering this training that not only helps members thrive on the job day-to-day but also helps assure their long-term employability through a series of basic skills-teaching packages that use cutting edge technologies; and

WHEREAS, in December 2005, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy estimated that 30 million adults have below basic English literacy skills, and that many of those surveyed felt that their literacy skills limited their ability to meet the demands of the workplace and they decided to participate in training or education; and

WHEREAS, new technologies and work reorganization have increased the education, literacy and skill requirements needed for our members to actively participate and advance in their workplaces; and

WHEREAS, basic skills like reading, writing, oral communications, numeracy and computer skills; the ability to understand, retain and utilize written and oral information; critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution; social and economic analysis are the foundation to build any new educational and training programs; and
WHEREAS, employers are not investing in apprenticeship training at the time in which the shortage of skilled workers is imminent; and

WHEREAS, the USW provides oversight to assure that dislocated Steelworkers receive effective job training and placement services through consolidated government programs, and the USW has been at the forefront in supporting the development of new technologies which utilize the many skills and talents of our members; and

WHEREAS, the union in Canada has a long history of working with employers, provincial and federal governments, and in some instance with other unions, to create sector based councils that develop, promote and deliver training and labour adjustment programs that are tailored to meet the needs of workers; and

WHEREAS, The Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress (CSTEC), has operated for over twenty years and offers skill development programs for Canadian steelworkers, provides leadership in the development of training programs that benefits workers, and continues to demonstrate the enormous potential of sector based approaches to apprenticeship and training for both workers and employers; and

WHEREAS, our union in Canada is currently working with other unions and with employers in the forestry sector to create a sector council in order to more effectively address the training and labour adjustment needs of workers in that sector; and

WHEREAS, for our members who have already been permanently displaced from their jobs or face the possibility of such displacement in the future, effective job training and placement services must be provided; and

WHEREAS, the Congress of the United States has acted to restructure a myriad of diverse training programs into a small number of such programs; and

WHEREAS, reactionary elements in Congress also seek to privatize employment placement and labor exchange services, eliminate federal standards of performance and public accountability in the administration of job training programs, drastically reduce funding for all such programs, and eliminate targeted funding for the training of dislocated workers and those displaced by international treaties governing trade; and

WHEREAS, the Canadian Federal Government, under the guise of providing better accountability for funding training programs, has reduced resources to labour and community based adjustment programs.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that:

(1) In the United States, our union should continue to expand its pioneering efforts to establish Career Development and other training programs, funded
by collectively bargained employer contributions, that realize the desires of our members for lifelong learning and give them the opportunity to improve their literacy and basic skills, develop portable skills, and enhance their personal and family relationships by expanding their education opportunities, training and counseling inside and outside of their workplaces.

(2) In Canada, our union should continue to build on its track record of creating effective sector councils that bring unions, employers, provincial and federal governments, and community colleges together to develop and deliver training and labour adjustment programs that are designed to meet the needs of workers.

(3) We must revitalize apprenticeship training by increasing the pressure on employers and ensure regulations and the enforcement of training and occupational standards in skilled trade jobs is maintained; to raise the employers support and participation in apprenticeship programs and to strengthen the national and international portability of skill trade credentials and the mobility of skilled trades people.

(4) We must intensify our legislative activity in support of effective training and retraining programs, including those that train workers involved in new technologies, such as the high speed Maglev transportation system, which may offer significant employment opportunities building on the skills and talents of our members.

(5) Employers must meet their responsibility to provide comprehensive training programs for their active employees and, in partnership with government retraining programs, for their displaced and injured workers.

(6) While our union supports a rationalization of the myriad job training programs, we demand that any restructuring provide adequate funding, including targeted and expanded funding for trade adjustment assistance, dislocated workers’ training and trade redadjustment assistance, and enable our union, the public and Congress to retain the ability to track job losses attributable to unacceptable trade legislation such as NAFTA.

(7) Our union supports strong accountability measures in any expenditure of public moneys but such measures should not be used to privatize adjustment services and destroy labour and community based programs that served workers successfully for many years.

(8) Any restructuring of job training programs must include a strong federal role in defining standards, must remain accountable through public administration and oversight and must include balanced representation of organized labor, employers, educators and community organizations in the planning and administration of these programs.