

Women of Steel Organizing the Unorganized

More women are working than ever before. And they, like Women of Steel in the USW, are looking for solutions to the problems of juggling work and family, making ends meet and finding respect and opportunities on the job. We as women in the United Steelworkers of America have knowledge, skills and experiences that can benefit other working women who are not part of our union family. We have the benefits and protections of a strong union that assists us in collectively addressing the issues facing working women in the 21st century. Our challenge is to reach unorganized women with information they need to make enlightened decisions on joining our Union.

You have the skills and knowledge to help our organizing efforts.

Although you may have never organized or held a union office, you know the issues facing working women. You know the advantages of having a union contract. And studies have shown that in organizing campaigns, unorganized women are highly influenced by female organizers because they can better relate to their similar issues as workers. As Women of Steel, you are building a sisterhood of identity in our Union which needs to be mentored into communities where sisters need support and outreach to win union representation.

Women make up a growing percentage of union membership.

In 1962, women accounted for 19 percent of union membership.¹ By 2001, 42 percent of all union members were women.² When they have the opportunity, women consistently are more likely

than men to vote for a union.³ Women represent 20 percent of the USW membership and their numbers are growing as we organize new sectors in healthcare, telemarketing, and public sector jobs.

Even though workers want Unions, organizing campaigns need the support and facts from Women of Steel and a strong Union to win their rights.

When a majority of workers say they want a union, employers routinely threaten their right to make their own free choice by creating a campaign of coercion and harassment. When faced with employees who want to join together in a union, 91% of employers force those employees to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda. 80% require immediate supervisors to attend training sessions on how to attack the union effort. 70% have supervisors deliver anti-union messages to workers they oversee. 80% hire outside consultants to run anti-union campaigns, often based on mass psychology and distortion of the law.⁴

In order to disseminate factual information and answer questions about what union representation means for workers and their families, union organizers must contact workers through events and activities outside the worksite. One of the “safest” places for unorganized workers to ask their questions and get information is after work, usually at their homes which requires a large number of member-volunteers to work on any given campaign so that all workers are contacted in the shortest time possible.

Organizing is a Women of Steel Issue.

The USW has worked to open more opportunities for women within the Union and is mentoring cultural changes that are seeing more women holding positions of leadership in all areas of the Union. Women of Steel can highlight these opportunities to the large numbers of unorganized women who are seeking a union. The facts and figures are simple - as the female membership of the USW grows, so does Women of Steel and all other issues concerning women and working families.

What Can You Do?

- ◆ Contact your District Office and get on a volunteer list for organizing
- ◆ Invite a District Organizer or a Woman of Steel sister who has done organizing to speak at your women's committee meeting
- ◆ Have your women's committee or council organize a group of women interested in being volunteer organizers for a weekend class on basic techniques and arrange for an instructor through your District Office
- ◆ Sponsor a celebration for a newly organized unit in your area and welcome the sisters and brothers into our Union. Make Solidarity a visible action
- ◆ Organize a support action for the members at a facility that the Union is trying to help organize
- ◆ Volunteer to help with child care so that the In-plant organizing committee can help house call their members
- ◆ Sponsor a float or booth at community events to advertise the advantages of having a union especially how it helps women
- ◆ Offer to speak at a career day in a school or library about women in the workforce and the advantages of being a Woman of Steel

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, Bulletin 2070, December 1980.

² Bureaus of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1998.

³ Kate Bronfenbrenner, Director of Labor Education Research at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

⁴ Sources: Kate Bronfenbrenner, Cornell University: Commission on Future of Worker-Management Relations.

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- ◆ Invite sisters from unorganized plants in your community to visit the Union Hall or an event being planned by your Women's Committee so they can meet other women and learn about the Union
- ◆ **Never fail to say something good about your union. You are the greatest reflection of what a Union can accomplish for Working Women**

FACTS ABOUT WORKING WOMEN

- The number of working women has grown from 5.3 million in 1900 to 18.4 million in 1950 and to 66 million in 2001
- Women make up 18.3 percent of the labor force in 1900 and 46.6 percent in 2001
- In the U.S., 99 out of every 100 women will work for pay some point in their lives
- Women are projected to increase their share of the labor force to 48 percent over the 1998-2015 period
- In 2000, 12.8 million families were maintained by women, representing 17.8 percent of all families
- 78.5 percent of women who maintained families were employed in 2000
- In 2001, there were 3.6 million female multiple job holders
- 47 percent of all multiple jobholders in 2001 were women, up from 20 percent in 1973
- In 2000, women who worked full time, year-round earned 74.3 cents for every dollar earned by men

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- Over a lifetime of work, the average 25-year-old woman who works full time, year-round until she retires at age 65 will earn \$523,000 less than the average working man
- 55 percent of workers paid by temporary help agencies are female
- 70 percent of part-time workers are female
- In 2000, half of all older women receiving a pension got less than \$4,164 per year, compared with 7,768 per year for older men
- In 2001, women union members earned 30 percent more than non-union women, according to union wage data based upon the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers
- In 1962, women accounted for 19 percent of union membership; but by 2001, they represented 42 percent of all union members
- When given the opportunity, women consistently are more likely than men to vote for unions
- Women have much to gain from union membership - collective bargaining, fair treatment on the job, and the union wage advantage narrows the historic pay gap between men and women
- **Get Involved! Be part of the working team in the United Steelworkers that are changing the futures of working people and the face of our Union. The International Headquarters will put you in touch with your district organizing team - just contact them:
Call 1-877-511-8792**

E-mail to: organize@usw.org



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Thought to Ponder:

To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world