



Prepared Remarks of

Leo W. Gerard
International President
United Steelworkers

before the

Democratic Party Platform Committee

Cleveland, Ohio
August 1, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I am proud to be here today on behalf of the more than 1.2 million active and retired members of the United Steelworkers union, North America's largest industrial union representing workers in sectors ranging from steel to paper to rubber to chemicals to glass to teachers to taxi drivers. We are perhaps the most diverse union in this country and truly represent the face, and interests, of working America.

Today you will hear from a broad array of interests and groups on what language should be adopted as part of the 2008 Democratic Party platform.

You will hear from environmentalists about the need to combat global warming and to address the damage that has been done from the last eight years of anti-environmental policies.

And they are right.

You will hear from teachers about the devastating impact budget cuts and freezes have had on their ability to teach the next generation and to give their students the tools they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive world economy.

And they are right.

You will hear from civil rights leaders as to the efforts that have been made to turn back the clock on the progress we have achieved and to drive a wedge between us.

And they are right.

You have heard from other representatives of organized labor about the anti-worker agenda that has catered to the interests of employers at the expense of the health, safety, dignity, lives and livelihoods of working people across this country.

And they are right.

Today, you will hear from many people who want to correct the policies of the past eight years and to change course.

And they are ALL right.

George Bush and his Republican henchmen have left this nation in debt – economically, morally, culturally and ideologically.

Our party stands united in wanting to change course. Senator Obama has inspired us to believe that not only is now the time, but that there is hope. Hope and, also, faith, that together, we can make a difference.

I want to spend my time today, posing a series of questions. Questions that demand answers if we are to truly succeed in promoting growth with equity.

These questions revolve around our nation's international trade policy – one significant area of debate within our party. While the public has increasingly shown its concerns with the direction of our nation's trade policies, our elected leaders do not stand united on what course to pursue.

Senator Obama has voiced his concerns. He has said that his first principle in approaching trade issues is that “our trade agreements must provide clear and measurable benefits for American workers....” He has made it clear that he will pursue a pragmatic, results-oriented policy that recognizes the need for the U.S. to lead, but that leadership requires the strong support of our citizens – citizens who, far too often, have seen their nation’s trade policies abandon their interests and jeopardize their jobs and their futures.

How can we continue to run trade deficits of hundreds of billions of dollars a year, accumulating more than \$6 trillion in current account deficits since 1994 – borrowing about \$2 billion each and every day and not expect that there will be a price to pay?

How can we expect to maintain a strong currency when our economy is so weak?

How can we lose more than 3.5 million manufacturing jobs and see more than 40,000 facilities shuttered and ask our citizens to support trade policies that have shipped their jobs overseas?

How can we refuse to pursue, aggressively enough, the fight for labor rights in America or overseas and expect that workers in other nations will have the rights necessary to be adequately compensated for their labor and help build a bridge to the middle class?

How can we watch as other nations – like China -- subsidize their producers, dump their products on our markets and refuse to accept our goods in their markets while our leaders simply continue to spout ideology and refuse to enforce our own laws?

How can we let policymakers tell our children that they should work hard and go to college to get one of the “jobs of the future” when those jobs, increasingly, are being done offshore as our nation’s advanced technology trade deficit with China alone amounts to more than \$67 billion?

How can we control our own economic destiny when country after country with which we’ve built up huge trade deficits create sovereign wealth funds that are beginning to shop the American market for bargain basement deals, jeopardizing our ability to act in America’s interests?

These are just some of the many questions that must be answered – some in our Party’s Platform – and the remainder as we reclaim the presidency in November.

The Democratic Party’s platform is more than a document that outlines the aspirations of our nominee. It is the roadmap that guides our entire party – our leaders in the Governor’s mansions, in the Congress, in the state houses and elsewhere.

We must confront the need to reject the status quo approach to trade and adopt a new framework that is pro-worker, pro-trade, pro-growth, pro-equity.

Mr. Chairman. Members of the Committee. Now is the time for us to lay the framework for real change that will have the support of the American people.