

USW Steps Up Fight for Fair Trade

(September 4) – As thousands of Steelworkers were marching in the streets of Pittsburgh, Chicago and Indiana this week, and our bargaining committees in Pittsburgh were continuing to work hard to reach a fair contract settlement, USW leaders were waging the union’s fight for fairness on another important front: the issue of unfair trade.

So far this summer, the USW has signed on as a supporter in three major steel industry trade cases filed with the Department of Commerce. In these cases, the union has partnered with several steel companies, including U.S. Steel, to stop countries including Brazil, China, Japan, and South Korea who are either benefiting from unfair government subsidies or selling steel abroad for below-market prices. This practice, known as “dumping,” violates international trade laws. These trade cases apply to unfairly traded hot-rolled sheet, cold-rolled sheet and corrosion-resistant steel. Overall, the union has filed more than 150 trade cases to protect jobs in the American steel industry.

These cases are just a few of the many the USW supports each year to protect members in all industries from the systematic attacks of unfair trade. We fight to win these cases by partnering with our employers, testifying before the International Trade Commission and lobbying our legislators and trade representatives with visits, letters and phone calls. These investigations take time, money and hard work to win, but they often are the only tool we have to prevent our trading partners from using the U.S. market as their dumping ground and killing our jobs in the process. Year after year, product after product, we fight for fairness on behalf of our members. The trouble is, in order to win these cases, often we have to first show that we’ve been injured by these practices. That means we have to lose before we can win.

In addition to the problem of unfair trade, which leads to unsustainable trade deficits and threatens thousands of jobs, the domestic steel industry today is facing potentially even more serious problems of global overcapacity and currency manipulation. These issues, driven largely by China, result in lower prices for steel produced by our trading partners. This massive overcapacity is in large part due to a slowdown in major steel-consuming regions.

The fact is, as hard as we fight for fairness, continuing that fight alone is not enough. We need to establish a new system of rules and enforcement that puts workers first. As International Vice President Tom Conway told the Congressional Steel Caucus this spring: “Simply doing more of the same is unacceptable. The Steelworkers do not want trade cases. We want trade to work for working people. Our members want a new trade policy that puts results – results for domestic producers and workers – ahead of all else.”

When given a level playing field, USW members can compete with any workers in the world. But it takes constant vigilance on the part of our union to keep that playing field level. That’s why we need every USW member in every steel town in the country to take up this fight for fairness along with us.

The union will meet with the company on Friday and over the weekend. We are counting on your continued support and solidarity. Stay strong and safe and we will update you as events unfold.

In Solidarity,

Your 2015 U.S. Steel Bargaining Committee