

# *Why the Steward System WORKS*

The best functioning representation system for Union members is one in which the member with a problem goes first to the Shop Steward for assistance, before a higher level officer or Union staff is called in. *The advantages to the member are:*

- 1) The Steward does the same work, often has the same title, has to come back to the same workplace, in other words is very much like the member themselves, and therefore gives the message that the member has the ability to stick up for their rights also.
- 2) The Steward is easily accessible; s/he is right at the workplace, and action can be taken quickly, without delay. And the Steward often knows, without needing lengthy explanation from the member, a lot of background and detail of general problem areas and personalities in the member's department and specific work situation.
- 3) The Steward most readily knows if other members are affected.
- 4) A supervisor or manager is less likely to feel defensive or polarized into an extreme position than if "someone from the outside" is the first Union representative confronting him/her; early settlement is somewhat more likely if the boss doesn't feel cornered.
- 5) If a manager or supervisor sees immediate evidence of the Steward's presence in the workplace, s/he is more likely to avoid actions that could lead to grievances.
- 6) Saving the Union staff's intervention until later in the process means the member has the benefit of a "one-two punch" and clear evidence to management that the member has support.
- 7) When management deals with the same representative from the Union on every problem - the Union staff - there is a natural management assumption that "the Union can't win them all" and to feel that after a while the Union "owes them one" because the Union staff got the last three or four problems settled in the Union's favor. This is a lot less likely if management is dealing with different representatives, and each issue is more likely to be seen on its individual merits.

*The advantage to the Union* itself, as well as to the members, of a well functioning Steward system is that dues can be kept lower than if paid staff is needed for every type of representation.

However, in order for such a system to be useful, or to function at all, Stewards must be able to guarantee a member who approaches them certain minimum skills and types of information, and be willing to get help if necessary from the Union staff when a problem or question arises which the Steward isn't able to solve.

***AFSCME DISTRICT COUNCIL 57***

*Research and Training Program*