

Resolution 20: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Labor Movement Now and for the Future

Submitted by the Civil and Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Women Workers and the Executive Council

Referred to the Resolutions Committee

THE LABOR MOVEMENT STANDS AT A CROSSROADS. Membership in unions is declining, but unions and collective worker power are needed more than ever to address record income inequality and unfair, arbitrary treatment on the job. Extreme politicians and their corporate backers are attacking unions and workers with an intensity not seen in decades. Yet workers across the United States have shown real resilience and courage, facing down these attacks and standing together to form unions, build power, and bargain with their employers for a better life and fairer treatment on the job.

As the labor movement debates strategies for revitalizing and building a broader, stronger movement for the future, diversity in the labor movement at all levels must be made an even higher priority than ever. A diverse and inclusive labor movement is essential to connecting with and representing the workforce of the future, where women workers, workers of color, LGBT workers and young workers are the clear majority.

With the workforce getting ever more diverse, it is more important than ever that the labor movement redouble its efforts to build diversity within its ranks.

From 1983 to 2012, employment of African Americans grew from just under 9 million to just under 15 million, and Latino employment rose from nearly 5 million to 20.1 million. The number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the workforce—currently nearly 7 million workers—is 20 times higher than in 1960. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between now and the year 2020, the U.S. workforce is projected to become more diverse, with white workers making up a decreasing share of the labor force while African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans become an increasing share of the workforce. Women, who composed 48% of the employed workforce in 2012, are expected to have proportionately greater growth in the workforce between now and 2020 compared with men.

Fortunately, this growth in the workforce corresponds with groups that are more likely to be union members and to have positive views toward unions. While African Americans are 11.7% of the workforce, they constitute 14% of union members. According to a new poll by the Pew Research Center for the People, African Americans hold very positive views toward unions—69% positive, compared with 51% for the population as a whole. They are 19% more likely to join unions, according to recent research by Dr. Steven Pitts of the University of California at Berkeley.

Latinos are 14% of union members, up from 6% in 1983. As with African Americans, Latinos hold a very positive view of unions, with 58% of Latinos expressing a positive view in the recent Pew Research survey.

Over the years, membership of women in unions has increased significantly, such that now 45% of union members are women, compared with 33% just 30 years ago. The Pew research found that women, too, hold positive views of unions (55% positive), demonstrating both the importance and the potential of women in the labor movement.

And while their percentage of union membership is the lowest at 4.2%, young workers (i.e., people younger than 30) have very positive views of unions (61% positive), according to the Pew study.

At the past several AFL-CIO conventions, delegates have endorsed wide-ranging and ambitious measures to promote and build diversity within the labor movement. The last two resolutions—Resolution 2 in 2005 and Resolution 7 in 2009—were far-reaching resolutions calling for action in all parts of the labor movement to build diversity in our movement. These initiatives have had a real and positive effect in moving forward the federation's programs and work to support diversity.

The 2009 convention also took the historic step of electing two women to AFL-CIO executive officer positions, meaning that for the first time ever, the AFL-CIO's executive officers were majority female.

In 1995, the convention adopted governance changes to ensure representation of women and people of color on the AFL-CIO's governing bodies, and those provisions were strengthened and expanded in 2005. Today, women hold 20% of the seats on the AFL-CIO's Executive Council, compared with 12% in 1995 and 2005. People of color hold 23% of the seats on the AFL-CIO Executive Council, compared with 22% in 2005 and 20% in 1995.

In 2005, the convention also adopted constitutional language requiring union delegations to the AFL-CIO convention to generally reflect the racial and gender diversity of the union's membership. This mandate helps to ensure that the delegates making key decisions about the labor movement's policy priorities and actions represent the diversity of the membership of the AFL-CIO's unions. In 2009, the first year the mandate was in effect, 43% of the delegates to the AFL-CIO convention were women or people of color—a true measure of success in implementing this important change. The 2009 convention adopted additional reforms aimed at ensuring that delegates from state, area and local central bodies are diverse. These measures will be in place for the first time at the 2013 convention and will add even greater diversity to the labor movement's highest governing body.

Similarly, the convention resolutions encouraged the AFL-CIO's state, area and local central bodies to make conscious efforts to build diversity in their organizations—at the leadership level and in the hiring of key staff. Today, 24% of state federation officers are women and 16% are people of color, up from 17% and 15%, respectively, in 2005. Twenty-three percent of CLC executive board seats are held by women, and 16% by people of color. These numbers show some improvement since 2005, when Resolution 2 was passed.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that progress in diversifying leadership seems to have stalled at the national, state and local levels, making it that much more important to reaffirm the federation's commitment to diversity and redouble our efforts so that we can continue to move forward and make progress.

State, area and local central bodies have taken action to bring the AFL-CIO's constituency groups into their organizations, including onto their governing boards. These efforts have helped ensure representation and involvement by active chapters of the constituency groups in the work of state and local labor movements and helped link the constituency groups to the programmatic priorities of the AFL-CIO's state and local organizations. And dozens of state and local labor movements now have young worker committees or programs, helping to ensure that the energies, issues and concerns of young workers are reflected in the work of our movement.

The AFL-CIO has emphasized diversity when recruiting and training new organizers and leaders. In 2005, the AFL-CIO's Leadership Institute set a goal of ensuring that half of each class

be women or people of color, and the institute has met or exceeded that goal. In the most recent class, more than half (53%) of participants were female, more than half (53%) were under 40, and 41% of the class were people of color. This emphasis on and success in diversity, in training emerging leaders, is essential to building diversity in our movement now and for the future. Similarly, the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute, which trains new organizers, and the Union Summer program, which provides summer organizing internships to college students and others, have consciously worked to ensure racial and gender diversity in their classes. Two-thirds of Union Summer participants from 2010-present have been female, and 60% have been students of color. Forty percent of participants in the Organizing Institute's three-day training program have been women, and 40% people of color.

The labor movement's lawyers have demonstrated their commitment to building diversity in the ranks of union lawyers. The AFL-CIO's Lawyers Coordinating Committee, an organization of 2,000 union lawyers across the country, has undertaken an ambitious Diversity Initiative, including a Minority Outreach Program for law students of color, to recruit and retain law students and lawyers of color to ensure that the lawyers representing working people and their unions reflect the diversity of the workforce and our movement.

The AFL-CIO's commitment to diversity at all levels and in all parts of our movement must be deep and enduring. We must continually review our programs and efforts to ensure that we are doing all that we can at all levels to build diversity in our movement. This commitment to diversity is part of who we are as a movement and also recognizes what we must be as a movement if we are to connect with the workforce of the future and build a stronger, broader, more inclusive movement.

Therefore, be it resolved that this convention endorses and reaffirms the provisions of Resolutions 2 and 7 and urges active efforts to continue the progress made under these resolutions.

The federation must prioritize and deepen its commitment to, and investment in, leadership development in order to equip a diverse group of future leaders with the skills and background to succeed.

The AFL-CIO itself must lead by example, in its hiring, promotions, leadership development opportunities, purchasing practices and decisions about resource allocation, to ensure that building and retaining diversity in our movement is a top consideration.

We must actively engage in legislative and policy advocacy on issues of importance to diverse groups of workers to demonstrate our commitment to these communities. The labor movement's engagement on issues like voting rights, mass incarceration, student debt, paid sick days and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act shows the labor movement's commitment to issues important to our members and our allies. We are also committed to addressing racial profiling, which continues to be an egregious form of discrimination in this country. It is essential that we address these and other critically important issues as we work to broaden the labor movement.

While the labor movement's work in these areas continues, the AFL-CIO shall conduct a comprehensive review of diversity in the labor movement—the AFL-CIO itself, its state and local central bodies, the role played and value added by the constituency groups and efforts by affiliate unions. As part of this review, the AFL-CIO should commission any necessary studies and reports and engage in outreach and discussion with affiliates, allies and other sources. This review should be completed no later than July 2014 and should produce a series of recommendations to be considered by the AFL-CIO Executive Council at its summer 2014 meeting.

