

A resolution passed in August 2017 by the 75th national convention of the United Electrical Workers (UE)

Fight Racism

Racism is one of the greatest evils in our nation, and has always been a roadblock to building a strong labor movement. Racism is a specific form of discrimination based upon the false belief that some groups of people are inherently and biologically superior to others. Racism inside the U.S. developed for the purposes of dividing the working class and justifying the brutal system of coerced labor called slavery.

The persistence of institutional racism affects all peoples of color, and is evident in the economic and social disadvantages experienced by African Americans in particular. African-American unemployment remains disproportionately high. On average, African Americans are twice as likely to die from disease, accident, and homicide as whites. African Americans are three times more likely to become prisoners once arrested, and serve longer terms. Racism blames the victims of these conditions, rather than blaming the system that creates these injustices.

Donald Trump who has shafted working people throughout his business career and has stacked his cabinet almost entirely with white, male, anti-worker Wall Street cronies, owes his election in part to pervasive racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Trump's scapegoating of Latino immigrants and Muslims and open appeals to racism have made our nation a more violent and dangerous place for all working people, especially Muslims, immigrants, and people of color. He has issued two executive orders banning Muslims from seven countries from entering the country, even those with a green card, and refusing entry of refugees from Muslim-majority countries. He has also given the green light for aggressive deportation of Latino and other immigrants.

Indian engineer Srinivas Kuchibhotla was killed in a bar in Kansas in February 2017. Bowie State University student and recently commissioned U.S. Army Second Lieutenant Richard Collins II, an African-American man, was stabbed to death in Maryland by white supremacist in May 2017. Also in May, two white men, Ricky John Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, were killed by a white supremacist on a train in Portland, Oregon after stepping forward to defend two girls, one of whom was wearing a hijab, from the supremacist's racist rant.

The Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis and various other organized white supremacist groups operating under the guise of the "alt-right" embraced Trump as their candidate and have been emboldened by his victory. IN August 2017, hundreds of these white supremacists descended on Charlottesville for a violent protest which claimed the life of a young woman, Heather Heyer, and injured dozens more. The white supremacists were in Charlottesville to protest the city's decision to remove a statue of a Confederate leader – a traitor – who believed American people should be enslaved, and which was as erected in 1924, an era in which the symbolism of the Confederacy was used to promote Jim Crow segregation and Klan violence against African Americans, Jews, Catholics, trade unionists and others.

People of color, especially African Americans, are more likely to be stopped by police, searched, arrested, and become the victims of police and vigilante violence. The murder of countless people of color by racist police officers is outrageous. This is not merely the result of individual racist police officers but of a widespread, systematic disrespect for the lives of people of color.

This disrespect is being further stoked by Trump and his administration. In a speech to police on Long Island in July 2017, Trump openly encouraged law enforcement to be violent with those they arrest, repeatedly referring to people suspected of crimes as “animals.” Attorney General Jeff Sessions has halted Justice Department pursuit of court orders to address racist abuses by local police departments.

In response to police violence against African Americans in recent years, Black Lives Matter has become a mass movement. Since the election of Trump, hundreds of thousands of Americans have taken to the streets to oppose Trump's so-called "Muslim ban," his stepped-up war against immigrants, and the racist far-right. UE stands with all of those who have marched and bravely stood up to hatred, racism, and violence.

Working-class unity can never be taken for granted. Winning depends upon our success in the fight against racism. UE and the wider labor movement is not immune from racism. We must consciously work to overcome racism in our diverse working class.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THIS 75th UE CONVENTION:

1. Reaffirms UE’s policies of aggressive struggle against racism and in support of equal rights;
2. Calls on locals to defend our members aggressively against on-the-job discrimination;
3. Calls on locals to develop pressure campaigns against any employers that discriminate against people of color in their hiring practices;
4. Declares its support of workers and their communities' fight against divisive racist terror;
5. Calls on the leadership of our union to take affirmative action in the development and election of more leaders of color and the hiring of staff of color;
6. Opposes the assault on affirmative action;
7. Calls for continued workshops on racism and discrimination at all levels of our union;
8. Calls for elimination of racial profiling, police brutality, and "stop-and-frisk," and a repeal of "stand-your-ground" laws;
9. Urges the union on at all levels to support and work with local Black Lives Matter groups and other organizations fighting racism and discrimination;
10. Condemns all attacks on the basis of ethnicity and religion, particularly those on Arab-Americans, Muslims, and Latinos;
11. Calls on the union at all levels to make our members and communities aware of the increase of hate groups in our country, to provide information to help them to recognize and combat all forms of hate, and to expose racism in the media;
12. Urges regions and locals to set up Unity Councils on the model pioneered by Local 506;
13. Demands strict enforcement and just punishment for violation of existing anti-discrimination laws;
14. Urges the union movement to expose and condemn racially biased and selective reporting which blames people of color for the poverty they are suffering as a result of government and corporate policies;
15. Urges locals to study the Freedom Manifesto and mobilize their African American members to attend the National Assembly for Black Liberation.