

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON EQUITY TO THE 67TH ANNUAL CWA CONVENTION

The National Committee on Equity recognizes that each year brings new delegates to our great Convention. We want to take this opportunity to share with you the National Committee on Equity's Mission Statement:

The Mission of the National Committee on Equity is to develop and promote the CWA Civil Rights program. Our vision is to build a union wherein members of all cultures, religions, sexual orientations, gender, disabilities, ages and nationalities feel welcome, respected, and heard and where the leadership reflects the diversity of our membership.

The duties and responsibilities of the National Committee on Equity are to:

1. Provide guidance and information to the districts and locals on the CWA Civil Rights program.
2. Keep the CWA Executive Board apprised of civil rights issues that affect our members and communities and, when necessary, offer a course of action.
3. Research, report and make recommendations or give direction to convention delegates on current civil rights issues.

The National Committee on Equity convention report lays the foundation for the CWA Civil Rights agenda for the upcoming year. Local Committees on Equity are encouraged to use the report as a working document to move the Civil Rights agenda forward in the districts.

Our History

Since the 1970's under the leadership of our founding President Joseph A. Beirne, CWA has strived to become a diverse union committed to providing representation and protection for all its members. In 1972 CWA established the Office of Ethnic Affairs in an effort to involve more minorities in the union and to assist minorities' advancement to all levels of the union. In 1973 the CWA Executive Board adopted the CWA policy on discrimination. As a result of discussion held at the 1973 convention on methods by which CWA would deal with problems of women and minority members, the Executive Board established a "Blacks and Other Minorities Structure Study Committee" and a "Female Structure Committee." Additionally, The Executive Board directed President Beirne to develop a program to involve more minorities and women in CWA.

In 1974, the Executive Board under the leadership of President Glenn Watts, authorized the appointment of a National Committee on Equity. The Committee is composed of one minority representative from each CWA district. The National Committee on Equity held its first meeting in 1976 and has continued to meet annually since. The Committee's task was to review the status of our minority members and make recommendations to the CWA Executive Board.

In 1982 the Committee held its first National Minority Conference. Due to the overwhelming success of the national conference, it was recommended that the districts sponsor annual District Minority Conferences. In response to recommendations by the Committee for training opportunities directed at minorities, the Executive Board established the Minority Leadership Institute (MLI). The Minority Leadership Institute is a three-week intensive study program held annually and is designed to teach minorities leadership skills. The participants are recommended by the district vice presidents.

Under the leadership of President Morton Bahr, in 1989 the office of Ethnic Affairs was changed to the Office of Civil Rights and Fair Practices. The CWA Executive Board also adopted recommendations to include the Discrimination Policy in the CWA Constitution.

Until 1991, both the National Committee on Equity and the Women's Committee made written recommendations directly to the CWA Executive Board. At the 1991 convention, delegates adopted a constitutional amendment requiring the National Committee on Equity and the National Women's Committee to report to conventions on activities and make recommendations.

As history has demonstrated, we have definitely come a long way. Our union has changed; we are no longer solely a telecommunications union. As mergers continue to take place within CWA, the makeup of our membership continues to expand and diversify. However, the role of the National Committee on Equity has not changed. Working with the Office of Civil Rights and Fair Practices, we will continue to work toward making CWA a union where all cultures, religions, sexual orientations, genders, disabilities, ages and nationalities are welcome. We will continue to fight against discrimination in the workplace, in our communities, in our union and within the labor movement.

Education

There is no denying that CWA has made much progress with regard to its education programs. It is by far a flagship organization in this area. As this great union changes to meet modern day challenges, one of those directions should be to renew its efforts towards education within the union.

CWA has always been committed to educating its members, but never has there been a time, since the beginning of the labor movement, when a well-informed, knowledgeable membership is so vitally needed. While we should continue to focus on negotiating employer-paid educational programs within our bargaining units, we must also look at current training programs offered to our local leaders.

Just as other professions offer continuing education on products, services and laws that affect their clients, new emphasis should be placed on our current education and training programs to ensure they are designed to meet the needs of a diverse and younger membership.

Like the convention delegates who approved the recommendations made by the National Committee on Equity for the first Minority Leadership Institute, CWA should continue make sure that all leaders (especially minorities and younger activists) are given educational opportunities to advance in the union.

In addition to our minority program, our Stewards, Leaders, New Officer and Staff training programs should be reevaluated and updated to include a diversity component. Our union is composed of many individuals made up of various nationalities and races. Any education program is conducive to the free exchange of ideas; therefore free exchange with fresh ideas can only make our union more vibrant!

Minority Leadership Institute

In 1973, at a meeting of the CWA Executive Board, a vision and a mission were adopted. The Executive Board wanted to make it clear that discrimination would not be tolerated at any of the companies with which CWA held working agreements. They also made it clear that discrimination would not be tolerated within the union.

In order to practice what we preach, a review of our local committees and steward groups was done to try to get them to reflect the diverse makeup of local membership. Diversity is one of the key components to growing the union. Another key component is education, so in keeping with the mission, the National Committee on Equity met in June 1984. At that meeting the Committee recommended the formation of a Minority Leadership Institute. In an attempt to diversify, educate and grow the union at all levels, the MLI was charged with helping minorities at the local level become educated leaders. The idea was to have in place a resource of qualified minority candidates available for promotion and appointment to staff positions.

The MLI has produced many qualified graduates but the statistics bear out that not many of those graduates have been appointed to staff or other appointed positions within our union. The theory of educating and growing the union is good but not if those graduates are not utilized at the local, district and national level. MLI costs our union \$6,700 and 3-weeks of our people's time. The underutilization of MLI graduates is the breakdown of the vision. The MLI does a great job preparing minorities, women and people of color to take on greater leadership roles in our union, but the opportunity has to present itself to be able to take our union to the next level and keep the labor movement growing, not just in numbers, but also in having a greater number of minority leaders.

It has been over twenty years since the inception of the MLI and this National Committee on Equity feels it is time to move on and finish the mission and in order to do that we must give the process a tune-up. In doing this we feel that we can bring the vision of the 1973 Executive Board and President Joe Beirne to fruition.

In a letter addressed to President Morton Bahr dated August 29, 2004, the National Committee on Equity encouraged the CWA Education and Civil Rights departments to work together in developing a curriculum and evaluating the continued success of the Minority Leadership Institute. Always mindful of the vision and mission, this National Committee on Equity makes the following recommendations to move the MLI into the twenty-first century:

1. If we are going to fight discrimination at all levels of our union, we must expand the opportunity to attend the MLI to our sisters and brothers in our newly merged sectors. The number of attendees should be increased from 10 to 12.
2. The recommendation and selection criteria should be uniform throughout all districts and sectors.
3. Each Local President should submit to his or her respective district vice-presidents a candidate and a letter of recommendation.
4. Change the length of the training from the present three weeks at the National Labor College to two weeks at the College and one week working in the participant's respective district offices. This will help in the development of a mentoring system within each district for returning students.
5. The Education Department must forward to the National Committee on Equity a follow-up report on each previous and upcoming graduating class of the MLI. This report will be used to monitor the success of the vision and mission within our union. We would also like these reports to be used as a resource for both the MLI and its graduates to help grow our union.
6. Reevaluate the curriculum for the MLI. This Committee will send a letter to the Education Department with recommendations.

The time has come for CWA to mobilize our resources and continue to grow our union. We will always fight tirelessly to abolish all forms of discrimination at our members' companies. Our local leadership must encourage the importance of having solid and productive Local Committees on Equity in order for the Vision and Mission of 1973 to endure.

THE VISION AND MISSION HAVE BEEN THERE FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS. THE TIME IS NOW TO COMPLETE THE MISSION!

The Next Generation

As a union of many faces, today we see the Next Generation made up of younger workers, women and people of color, an influx of immigrants from many ethnic origins, members of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender communities, and members who are new activists in the labor movement. The workplace affords the membership the benefits of unionism and collective bargaining, which assure them a healthy, safe, equitable and dignified work environment.

The Next Generation of CWA members will be charged with continuing to build our union. The spirit of full participation will have to be felt if they are to stay on the battlefield. Their presence should be seen at all levels of leadership within our union. There is no substitute for being in the room where policies are decided. African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Island Americans need to have a voice in affirmative action issues but also they need to have a voice in budget decisions that determine where resources go in our locals and the international union. Women must have a voice in equal pay and childcare, but they must also have a voice in organizing. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) members need to have a voice on hate crimes and domestic partner issues, and they must also have a voice in our union's political action program.

As we look for ways to integrate younger activists into our local unions, we should look at a resolution submitted by The Newspaper Guild at its annual conference. The Next Generation resolution calls for a committee of young workers to be established who will explore ways to better represent their interests, as well as ways to help inspire them to achieve higher goals.

We have come a long way but the struggle continues. History has mapped out for us where we have been and led us to where we are today. We must keep the momentum going as we move with the Next Generation into the 21st Century. The battle won for workers' rights assures our younger sisters and brothers that our diverse membership is recognized and heard. The concerns of all of our members should be at the center of all decisions that are made about our union. None of us should be viewed as an afterthought. We are the Movement. The Next Generation is the future.

Calling for a Diverse Movement

This is the 22nd anniversary of the first Minority Leadership Institute, which was designed to provide CWA minorities with the means for active participation, high visibility and an opportunity for upward mobility at all levels in the Union.

This program opened the doors for some MLI graduates to become executive board members, local officers or to acquire positions as CWA Staff Representatives or Organizers. Their roles include significant responsibilities for negotiating labor contracts, presenting arbitration cases and organizing workers into the union. And to prove their ability, all staff is required to take a competency test prior to hiring.

Despite decades of progress, CWA has not met its goal: a leadership that reflects its membership. While some effort has been made to achieve this goal it has been stopped by an unbreakable “glass ceiling” that doesn’t allow minorities opportunities to ascend to national leadership levels within CWA, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

According to a recent study conducted by Silas Lee, Ph.D., for the AFL-CIO’s Civil Rights Committee on overcoming barriers to full participation by people of color in today’s labor movement, a majority of activists said that their union’s leadership is dominated by white males. Additionally, 55 percent said that their union does not offer a supportive environment for minorities to move into leadership positions. And 65 percent say there continue to be barriers to minorities becoming leaders.

We are not the only union struggling to address this issue. This glaring cultural disparity has gone strangely unmentioned for numerous years, but is obvious when we reflect on recent staff movement caused by the retirement of several district vice-presidents and the passing of the baton to their assistants. This tradition creates the component of upward churn, based not on qualifications, ability to perform competently or proficiently but on the incumbent’s subjective appointments.

This is how it works: the newly appointed district vice-president gets to appoint the assistant of his or her choice. This candidate is drawn from a selective group based on the vice-president’s comfort level with that individual, thus creating a personal selection over our election process. This process has historically allowed district vice-presidents to handpick what our leadership will look like in the future.

Compounding this process is the disproportionate lack of consideration given to highly qualified minorities in administrative assistant positions or qualified minorities on staff to fill an assistant position or an administrative assistant position or any administrative personnel position appointed by the district vice-presidents.

This cultivated behavior is what creates the struggle for minorities to even crack that unbreakable barrier. The CWA Executive Board in its Policy on Discrimination adopted in January 1973, stated:

“...We must have greater recognition of the need for blacks and other minorities members’ voices, as well as views, at all levels of the Union...”

“The Board directs that the Union continue to search for a solution to this dilemma, and directs that the inequity of our present situation be continually kept before the Union.”

Unfortunately, in 2005 CWA’s solutions have produced only one minority in an appointed assistant position to receive the traditional baton handoff. Currently, only 12-percent of the assistant, administrative assistant or director positions are held by minorities in CWA. As of today, the 51 minorities in staff positions represent only 18 percent of the staff positions in CWA.

These statistics constitute the continued dilemma exhibited by the noticeable lack of advancement into decision-making positions for minorities within CWA. This is even more discouraging when we consider that nearly 30 percent of workers in unions today are minorities.

Despite the call for this issue to “be continually kept before our Union” by the CWA Executive Board, the Board has not initiated any new practices or policies to address its commitment to inclusiveness. The Executive Board did, however, change the discrimination policy in 2002 restating its commitment to non-discrimination within our union. For the most part, CWA’s policies dedicated to minority advancement are superficial because local and district leaders have unquestionable autonomy. There isn’t a relevant source responsible for monitoring or reporting on minorities’ status at the local level in CWA.

However, most of CWA’s major employers disclose workforce diversity reports to the public at their annual shareholders’ meetings, affirming their commitment to inclusiveness. Every year Fortune Magazine rates several of CWA’s major employers in their 50 most diverse corporations list. CWA should follow the example set by the companies it represents.

Recently the leadership of CWA publicly commented on the AFL-CIO restructuring and the role minorities should have in the leadership structure of the labor movement. How can we, CWA, point fingers and not acknowledge that our own house isn’t in order? CWA should follow the advice that it gave to the AFL-CIO.

To accomplish this CWA must restore the role that was given to the Office of Ethnic Affairs (now the office of Civil Rights and Fair Practices) in 1972. The purpose of that office was to assist active minorities’ advancement to all levels of the union. This department must be fully funded and adequately staffed if we are serious about diversity. It should be staffed with the necessary personnel required to ensure the successful development, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ethnic affairs practices and policies of the union.

The National Committee on Equity recommends that we not let another 33 years go by before we achieve our goal of minority advance at all levels of the union. This is an issue that does not need to be studied any longer. The CWA Executive Board should, with great speed, work toward achieving this goal along with supporting any amendments to the CWA Constitution that may be necessary to implement these policies.

The National Committee on Equity further recommends the following to be completed by the Office of Civil Rights and Fair Practices Department and reported out at the 2006 CWA annual convention:

- A report on the demographics of the union that identifies members according to race and gender for each of the reporting categories identified by the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission, and other minority classes listed either in numbers or percentages for each category.

- Develop a report on the race and gender of all elected officers, and their administrative personnel. This report should be distributed annually to delegates at the convention.
- CWA should provide a summary description of all minorities' advancement in CWA at all levels. A copy of all union policies and practices to advance equal opportunity for minorities in CWA should be available to all members through the Civil Rights Department.
- Establish reports to identify local Equity and Women Committees and initiate a recognition program within each District.
- The President should immediately implement and further develop for Board action an Affirmative Action Program to accomplish the objectives of the union's agenda to achieve diversity at every level of the union as outlined in the 1973 Board minutes.

The Change, The Mirror, The Reflection

At the merger of the AFL-CIO 50 years ago, America's union movement recognized we are stronger when we are united and inclusive. Almost immediately the labor movement became a partner with the civil rights movement and became a key player in the passage of the Civil Rights Act. From that point on the labor movement has always spoken out for equal rights for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, faith, age, sexual orientation, disability or immigrant status.

However, even the house of labor has struggled throughout history to remove the remnants of its own "isms." Like the AFL-CIO, we too have had our struggles and yes, we will continue to work on them as we move forward.

It is incumbent upon the union movement to stand before employers and governments in every part of the world as a model of openness, fairness and opportunity. We must find a way to balance our resources, building leaders in other countries as well as within our own union. America's union movement must stand as a model of full inclusion. We cannot ask more of the broader society than we are willing and able to do ourselves.

The National Committee on Equity commends the CWA Executive Board for supporting the following from Resolution 2 that was passed at the AFL-CIO convention:

Affiliated national unions to sign a set of diversity Principles, to be developed by the Civil Rights and Working Women's committees and approved by the Executive Council, and provide for affiliated national Unions to report annually on the representation of women

and people color in their membership as well as in staff and elected leadership positions at all levels.

Challenges for the Future

As we look at our past and our present, we must not forget the challenges that we will face in our future. We must continue to be diligent in our quest to protect the civil and social rights that we currently enjoy in our country.

Last year's Presidential election set the stage for the turbulent times we face today. People were denied the right to vote and some ballots were not even counted. Election reform is still badly needed in our country.

We must continue to keep our eye on affirmative action and the continued assault against this program by Ward Connelly and others to disrupt attempts to make our higher education system diverse.

Our sister union AFGE is currently in a fight that affects all of us — the downsizing of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The proposal, if adopted, would reduce the number of district offices from 23 to 15, resulting in the elimination of eight regional attorney positions and splitting several states into different jurisdictions. These changes will heavily impact the EEOC's overall litigation work.

It is important that we continue to lead the way in getting The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2005 passed along with keeping a close eye on judicial nominations. We must make sure that our members are aware of appointments that threaten working families and our civil and social liberties.

Within our union we must continue to pool our resources by coordinating our civil rights, legislative and coalition-building efforts to move the agenda of our members. This successful collective activity was demonstrated in the recent effort to introduce due process legislation for law enforcement officers.

As we observe the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the National Committee on Equity would like to encourage all CWA members to do the same by supporting our resolution, "Voting Rights for All." Your support will advance the legacy of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by ensuring the continued effectiveness of that Act to protect the rights of all Americans. Let's not forget those brave Americans, known and unknown, from every race and ethnic and religious background who risked their lives on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965. That day would come to be known as "Bloody Sunday." It was there where their bravery was tested to ensure that every American would have the right to vote.

Hope

As we move forward toward challenging but exciting times in our union, let's not forget one who has toiled in the fields of justice for all workers, but especially for our great

union — President Morton Bahr. President Bahr has set standards for CWA to become an education-driven union, focusing on worker training, education and minority advancement. From the mid-1980s to the present, he has helped CWA become one of the most respected unions in the world. He has shown us that we must all reach out to our members, teaching them the meaning of solidarity, and sharing one another's concerns, problems and solutions. Although we will miss you your legacy will continue as the President of education.

To our new leaders the challenge is now yours. The National Committee on Equity has set before you many challenges and we look forward to completing a 33-year-old task.

Respectfully Submitted,

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