

Resolution 106A – To Win Economic Justice for Working People, We Must Win Racial Justice

Four years ago, we committed to our union's *Vision for a Just Society*: where all workers are valued and all people are respected; where all families and communities thrive; and where we leave a better and more equal world for generations to come.

To achieve this vision we must confront the worst of our countries' pasts. Slavery has been the law of the land for 246 of the 397 years since the first colonists landed in what became the United States, for 361 years in Puerto Rico and 206 years in Canada. Hundreds of years of cruel treatment and control of Black people has resulted in a majority of Blacks working for less than a living wage, accumulating little or no wealth and struggling daily for dignity, respect and basic human rights. This highlights an important reality about our present—that economic equality and racial equality are fundamentally linked.

Today profitable corporations are pushing wages down, causing more than 64 million people to work for less than \$15 an hour. Even with multiple jobs, people are unable to make ends meet no matter how hard they work. Most are people of color. In fact, more than half of working people who are Black or Latino make less than \$15 an hour compared to 36 percent of white working people.

This is no coincidence and no one understood that better than the women of color who provided home care to older people and people with disabilities despite the fact that discriminatory labor laws denied them basic legal protections and even minimum wage—because these “domestic” jobs had traditionally been performed by Black women in the South. These women stood up to the racism that singled out their work as unequal and had been codified into our labor laws—and formed unions—paving the way for the thousands of other home care providers to join SEIU and improve their lives and the lives of the people they care for every day.

Home care providers are just one example of this kind of inequality. Much of the work we do—providing childcare, cleaning buildings, driving buses, working in laundries and more—is underpaid and undervalued simply because it's work that's been done by people of color and women. For decades, our union has been fighting to win justice for all working people by raising wages and improving their families' lives—and now it's clear that it's simply not enough. The work of unions has not eliminated racism and inequality affecting Black people. In fact, we will never achieve economic justice for working people without achieving racial justice.

These injustices are part of our countries' painful legacy of slavery and anti-Black racism and the continued systematic racial and economic inequalities in our government, economy, and the institutions most important to our daily lives. Even progress like the landmark Voting Rights Act is under attack, once again threatening the most basic democratic rights of Black Americans. The system is rigged against people of color, especially Black people, who are more likely to do worse than white people in economic well-being, housing, health, and in our broken and racially biased criminal justice system—where Blacks are five times as likely to be incarcerated and Latinos are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated as whites.

Just this year, we've seen systematic racial inequalities play out in heartbreaking ways in Flint, MI where more than 100,000 people—primarily Black people and immigrants—have been poisoned by their own water supply after the Governor, Rick Snyder, put hand-picked political appointees in charge of the city's public works—replacing the people of Flint's elected leaders. The governor's appointees switched Flint's water supply from Lake Huron, which is fed by fresh water springs, to the polluted Flint River to save a relatively small amount of money.

Even our most hallowed institutions have yet to shed the vestiges of our long history of anti-Black racism. The remarks made by Supreme Court Justice Scalia that “[t]here are those who contend that it does not benefit African-Americans to get them into the University of Texas where they do not do well, as opposed to having them go to a less-advanced school, a slower-track school where they do well,” are a poignant reminder that the legacy of racism even cloaks the institution responsible for ending legal segregation and inequality.

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Many of the social programs and laws that we associate with benefiting working people—Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act, the GI Bill, the Affordable Care Act, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESR) Article 6: Right to Work—have resulted in inequitable outcomes based on race. They have overwhelmingly benefited white people and significantly contributed to the wealth, healthcare, education and other disparities we see and experience today.

Inequality is woven into the very fabric of our society—called structural racism because it exists across institutions and society, creating systems that advantage white people while producing adverse outcomes for Blacks and other people of color. The result of decades of structural racism in our countries has had tragic outcomes, including the deaths of people like Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, Lamar "Papi" Edwards, and the criminalization of Black people who are incarcerated at a rate five times greater than whites.

This plays out in our countries every day, dividing us by race and hurting all of us. For example, we hear politicians, media personalities and others espousing the belief that high Black unemployment must be the result of a lack of trying. Serious problems that deserve attention, like climate change or the deterioration of critical infrastructure in cities like Flint, Michigan's water system, Puerto Rico's sewage treatment and Canada's wastewater and potable water system, often get ignored or downplayed because their impacts are seen first as issues affecting only Black and other communities of color. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels dominated international headlines while similarly horrific events in Beirut, Kenya, and Nigeria received little, if any coverage.

These and other high-profile incidents of excessive force by police and vigilantes and the over-representation of people of color in our criminal justice system over the last few years focused our attention on issues of racial injustice that have too often been ignored in our three countries. They underscored the fact that we could never realize our vision of a just society unless we confront the ugly legacy of slavery. SEIU members—the majority of whom are people of color—include thousands of millennials who are disproportionately affected and thousands more who work in criminal justice and law enforcement, which puts our union in a position to make unique contributions toward disrupting the crib to prison pipeline and toward reforming the criminal justice system.

We know from forming unions that "divide and conquer" strategies are often used to keep working people from coming together—and race has historically been one of the most powerful ways to pit working people against one another. Racism is a key way that the wealthy few regularly structure and hijack our economy and government to benefit themselves and disadvantage the vast majority of people, including white people.

So, in January 2015, our International Executive Board decided to take action and prioritize ending structural racism, particularly against Blacks, as part of our overall union agenda. The IEB established a Racial Justice Task Force with the belief that our union could and needed to take up racial justice.

The members of the Task Force concluded that we simply cannot achieve economic justice without racial justice. SEIU home care providers expose the conjoined nature of these fights. Even as thousands of providers have come together in unions, raising wages and improving services for their clients, the laws that treat their work as less than others' remain and continue the legacy of racism that has hurt the people who provide—and the people who need—care.

The labor movement won't succeed if we don't take on dismantling structural racism and ending anti-Black racism. Right now, even when working people win, it doesn't generate the same outcomes for all of us—it's like inviting someone to join a monopoly game after all the properties have already been taken. Tackling this is not just the right thing to do. Failing to address racism holds all of us back.

Over the past few years, we have seen an uprising of Black, Latino, Asian, Native, and white people together, in and outside of our union, declaring and demanding the worth and value of everyone, regardless of race. Together, we

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have a vision of a different world where racial and economic equity prevails, where all of us can participate, prosper and reach our full potential. Ending anti-Black racism and dismantling structural racism is in all of our self-interest. We reject the argument that this is a “zero sum game” and that in order for some of us to be okay others must suffer. We live in a world where there is plenty for everyone.

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. SEIU will establish an anchor and leadership oversight to prioritize, support, and drive the continued education and engagement process and implementation of ending anti-Black and structural racism. This includes:
 - a. Accountability and structure at the highest level of the organization;
 - b. Rooting existing and new equity and racial justice work throughout the Union ending anti-Black racism; and
 - c. Racial justice is embedded into all of the strategic work in and throughout the Union’s programs and campaigns.
2. We will engage in a sustained equitable process of education and engagement that supports our transformation of becoming an anti-racist organization and ending anti-Black racism at all levels of the Union beginning with developing accountability, incentive, and measurement systems through process of:
 - a. Evaluating our programs and strategies for their impact on dismantling structural racism and white supremacy;
 - b. Assessing our culture(s) and examine the ways it challenges or reinforces structural racism and either supports or challenges racial equity;
 - c. Conducting an analysis of our culture(s) to explore the ways it intentionally or unintentionally, advantages and disadvantages people based on race; and
 - d. Researching, developing, and adapting the values, norms, and practices that will help us behave and function as an equitable, anti-racist organization, and move us toward dismantling structural racism and ending anti-Black racism.
3. SEIU will develop economic justice strategies that take into account disrupting structural racism. For example:
 - a. Expanding beyond addressing income inequality to include wealth inequality strategies, since racial disparities are more pronounced there; and
 - b. Understanding the power our capital (e.g., members’ retirement savings) has on dismantling structural racism.
4. We will develop a comprehensive strategy with Black partners to build power in Black communities that:
 - a. Are self-determinative and sustained;

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- b. Directly challenges and dismantles the structures that define lasting Black economic, political, and social inequity;
 - c. Significantly changes both policy and public perception; and
 - d. Builds and strengthens the institutional and organizational infrastructure necessary for prioritizing racial equity.
5. SEIU will build on current and future campaigns in partnership with organizations in communities of color, criminal justice reform experts and engage with elected officials to improve police practice and policy reforms addressing:
 - a. Second chance initiatives like ban the box, seal or expunge criminal records, limit immigration consequences;
 - b. Criminal justice accountability to include anti-profiling measures, consent to search, community oversight board, minimize use of force;
 - c. Transparency initiatives like collecting and making available statistics of criminal justice; and
 - d. Ending mass incarceration through offense reclassification, opposing the expansion of the private for-profit prison industry, marijuana decriminalization, sentencing reform, eradicate the death penalty;
 - e. Accountability for elected officials involved in covering-up or enabling of police killings.
6. SEIU will take on the fight to end structural and anti-Black racism as part of our work to build a wider movement that will fight for an economy that works for everyone—including supporting people who are joining together to raise wages and improve workplace standards, fix our broken immigration system, to advance women’s rights, LGBTQ equality and to ensure that every community has clean air and water.
7. SEIU, and all affiliate Locals, agree to implement and will be held accountable to this resolution.