

Immigration

Submitted by UNITE HERE

THE UNITED STATES often has been called “a nation of immigrants,” and most Americans—with the notable exception of Native Americans—have ancestors who arrived from other countries, either voluntarily or involuntarily as enslaved Africans. Throughout American history, immigrants helped build America’s cities, towns, farms, businesses, economies and civic and cultural institutions.

Immigrants from around the world also helped build the American union movement, providing generation after generation of members, activists and leaders. Today, the composition of the foreign-born (immigrant) community is increasingly diverse. Immigrants, like all workers, have wide-ranging skills and experiences, work hard, pay taxes and share similar dreams and aspirations—education for their children, owning a home, good jobs and safe communities.

As a workers’ movement built by immigrants, we believe our nation should embrace immigrants for the diversity and values they bring, rather than fear them as threats to values or jobs. We cannot fall victim to employers who often attempt to divide workers by race, ethnicity and immigration status, playing one group against the other to undermine solidarity and preclude workers from achieving progress together.

In February 2000, the AFL-CIO Executive Council firmly and squarely set out our view that immigrants have played and continue to play an extremely important role in the workplace and society and that they are entitled to full and fair workplace protections.

In the fall of 2001, the AFL-CIO endorsed the historic Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, a national mobilization of individuals and organizations from all sectors—including labor, business, political, religious, community, immigrant, civil rights and others—that demonstrated to Congress and the president that there is widespread support in the United States for meaningful legislative reform and for the recognition of the contribution of immigrant workers to the quality of social, cultural, political and economic life in the United States.

Unfortunately, America’s current immigration system is still broken. Instead of legal channels, legal immigration and orderly, screened entry, the immigration system has fostered a black market characterized by a ballooning undocumented immigrant population, widespread use of fake documents, increasingly violent smuggling cartels and widespread exploitation of undocumented workers.

The labor movement seeks solutions that will work. We need a comprehensive solution that rewards work, reunites families, restores the rule of law, reinforces our nation’s security, respects the rights of U.S.-born and immigrant workers and redeems the American Dream.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will continue to strive for solutions to our broken immigration system that embody the following goals:

- Undocumented workers and their families should be provided the opportunity to earn legal status through a new legalization program;

- Employer sanctions should be replaced with a system that targets and criminalizes business behavior that exploits workers for commercial gain;
- Immigrant workers should have equal and full workplace rights, including the right to organize, full job portability and protections for whistleblowers;
- Labor and business together should design mechanisms to meet legitimate needs for new workers without compromising the rights and opportunities of workers already here;
- Elimination of the deadly, chaotic and illegal flow of workers to jobs with a legal future flow program, so needed workers can be admitted legally to fill available jobs, that protects the wages and working conditions of U.S. and immigrant workers, that permits unrestricted job portability, that permits the right to organize a union and provides a path to permanent legal status; and
- Passage of the AgJobs bill and the American Dream Act.