

## Our Commitment to Racial Justice

Dear UAOSU membership,

In honor of MLK Day and anti-racist movements broadly, we want to share a reminder of the close connections between racial justice movements and labor movements and a brief update on our union's anti-racist work.

In a speech to the Amalgamated Laundry Workers in 1962, King declared: *"The coalition that can have the greatest impact in the struggle for human dignity here in America is that of the Negro and the forces of labor, because their fortunes are so closely intertwined."*

Organized labor in the United States has a complicated history when it comes to racial justice. White union members often excluded Black workers and other workers of color, went on strike to protest the hiring of Black workers, advocated for immigration restriction, and in other ways helped to build and maintain White Supremacy. Black workers and other workers of color have played a key role in fighting for the rights of workers and an expansion of the social wage. Their efforts have inspired and mobilized many White workers and transformed the labor movement. From the "civil rights unionism" of the mid-twentieth century to the struggles of public sector workers to unionize and "bargain for the common good" from the 1970s into the twenty-first century, Black workers have been at the forefront of the most grassroots and progressive wing of the American labor movement, and have often seen labor rights as essential for racial justice and for building a more equitable and just society for all. At its best, organized labor has followed these workers' lead.

In that spirit, our union sees anti-racism and racial justice as a foundation of our work.

In 2020, an ad hoc Racial Justice committee worked closely with the Organizing Committee of UAOSU to draft two important statements expressing our commitment to social justice and anti-racism. In response to the federal government's threat to cancel international student visas if face to face instruction was not offered in Fall 2020, we issued our [statement of support for the contributions of international students and faculty to our university, community, and nation](#). After the nationwide upsurge of anger and grief in response to the killings of George Floyd, Breana Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others, we issued a [statement of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement](#). In it, we recognized the need to deepen our efforts as a union to confront racism and structural oppression at OSU. As part of that effort, we organized an information session with our members to hear from our community about what priorities we need to consider moving forward.

In Fall 2020, our ad hoc Racial Justice committee worked with OSU's Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) during two workshops focused on building anti-racist unions at OSU. We developed concrete action plans that we will pursue during 2021 and into the future, with our members' support, to ensure that our union is anti-racist in our culture, internal operations, bargaining, and relationships with the University and various communities.

Members of UAOSU's ad hoc Racial Justice committee will continue to serve our union's newly constituted Standing Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). According to the results of our Fall 2020 union elections, this committee is now officially chaired by Aurora Sherman (Psychology). We aim to work in a highly collaborative and team-based manner. If you are interested in joining this committee, and strengthening our union through anti-racist organizing, please contact Aurora at [socialjustice@uaosu.org](mailto:socialjustice@uaosu.org).

One of the first actions of the DEI Standing Committee is to propose a name change. Many rightly feel that the label DEI has been too extensively co-opted by university administrations and other neoliberal and bureaucratic organizations. We believe that the name Social Justice Committee better signals our working commitment to dismantle structural racism and *all* forms of oppression that cause disproportionate harm for marginalized people.

We know our work has just begun. We look forward to taking actions together that will help make OSU a place where Black faculty and other faculty and community members of color want to come and stay.

Thank you for your continued support in making our union a strong, anti-racist union.

Sincerely,

The Racial Justice Committee