

CBTU

COALITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS

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Nation's Top Black Labor Leader Calls for a Mass Convention In Gary, Indiana to Revive Independent Black Political Action

Rev. Jesse Jackson Endorses William Lucy's Call for Black Political Independence

Washington, DC –

William Lucy, the nation's most influential black labor leader, this week became the first leader of a major national black organization to call for a mass meeting to develop an independent political agenda in the African American community nationwide. Speaking over the Memorial Day weekend at the international convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), Lucy declared, "It's time to go back to Gary," a reference to Gary, Indiana, the site of the largest black political convention in U.S. history in 1972.

Lucy, who is co-founder and president of CBTU, said many leaders in the labor movement and the Democratic Party have taken black workers and black voters for granted, while denying them access to resources to fully mobilize their communities. Lucy said this lack of reciprocity is unacceptable.

"CBTU and others have spent a lifetime trying to prove our value in the political process. I pledge to you [CBTU delegates] that we are out of the game of begging for resources to mobilize our communities." Lucy continued, "Whether we are accepted by the powerful players in labor or the Democratic Party or not, we will continue to come to the aid of unorganized workers, and we will continue to mobilize our communities."

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., endorsed Lucy's call for a new independent black political motion. In his speech to CBTU delegates, Rev. Jackson said, "The women's struggle for the right to vote was independent. The labor struggles of the 1930's were independent. The 1955 bus boycott against segregation was independent. We must build an independent political struggle that will define priorities and behavior of both parties."

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In Phoenix, CBTU delegates unanimously adopted a resolution supporting Lucy's call for the revival of independent black politics. The "Gary" Resolution calls for a national convocation of grassroots advocates and leaders to achieve consensus about the elements of a Black Agenda, which would then be presented to organizations and in forums where the agenda could be discussed and advanced.

CBTU's "Back to Gary" call re-asserts a high-profile role for black labor that has historical precedent in A. Philip Randolph's call for a national march for jobs in 1963. Randolph's call resulted in the historic March on Washington in 1963, which solidified labor-civil rights cooperation and catapulted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to international fame.

Lucy said in spite of the resurgence of “the politics of paternalism, we can not simply wring our hands and moan. We must develop our own plan of action.” Lucy, who is a member of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, said, “It’s time to go back to Gary[Indiana] to talk among ourselves as trade unionists, as social activists, as political leaders, as academics about what it will take to move our communities forward.” Specifically, Lucy said it was time to reassess the strategy for empowering people of color. “We must think nationally and act locally,” he said, adding, “We must refocus our political efforts and use our organizing skills to build community power block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood.”

Lucy, international secretary-treasurer of the 1.4 million-member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), said black workers in unions have a unique role to play in developing a Black Agenda. “We must educate the rest of organized labor that you cannot have poverty and plenty exist side-by-side, without fueling instability in our social system. And we must educate organized labor that overt racism and subtle discrimination must be eliminated from every segment of our movement and from every aspect of the programs affiliated with our movement.”

More than 1,500 activists attended CBTU’s convention, which featured guest speakers, including AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition President Jesse Jackson, Sr., and Willy Madisha, president, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Sweeney, who is seeking a third term as president of the labor federation in July, urged members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to reject calls from SEIU President Andy Stern to disaffiliate from the AFL-CIO. He also said his vision for making the AFL-CIO more effective and more inclusive embodied ideas from CBTU.

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To read the full text of Sweeney’s and Jackson’s speeches, go to www.cbtu.org