

TWU Fights for Civil Rights and Women's Rights

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. recognized TWU's tireless dedication to equality more than 50 years ago and spoke at the union's 1961 convention. TWU members and leaders were honored to work with Dr. King, and the union continues to be proud of its efforts towards achieving equality and ensuring rights for working people of every race, color, creed, nationality, gender, and sexual orientation. Michael Quill founded TWU with these goals and every leader since has upheld his values.

In the middle of the 20th century, during times when a society seeped in racism and ignorance helped to bolster companies that practiced discrimination, TWU defied powerful authorities and fought those companies in the name of equality. Quill started his fight for minorities in 1937 when he worked with Local 100 to negotiate a contract with the New York IRT to raise the minimum weekly wage. He won significant pay increases for minority workers who were relegated to the lowest positions by the IRT's discriminatory hiring practices.

The following year, the union worked with the NAACP and the Urban League to get six black porters at the IRT promoted to higher paying station agent and platform men job titles, despite great opposition from the company and other workers.

TWU never backed down and successfully pressured the IRT to promote two black porters to conductors in 1939. That same year in New Orleans, the union defied local authorities and held the first ever desegregated trade union meeting in the Crescent City.

In 1941, TWU led a successful bus boycott in Harlem that forced the Fifth Avenue Coach Company to start hiring black mechanics and bus drivers. This started the integration of the workforce and finally reflected the city's population.

Around the same time, tense race relations in Philadelphia were used as a weapon by the Philadelphia Transportation

Company (PTC) and rival union organizers. TWU won representation for Local 234, which prompted the PTC to ally with their favored union leaders who had been rejected, to use racism in an attempt to overthrow TWU. They created a race crisis by staging a wildcat strike to protest the promotion of minority workers. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called in federal troops that quelled the fake strike. This helped TWU win the fight and start the integration of Philadelphia's transit system. Ten years later, TWU forced the Pennsylvania Railroad to delete the word "colored" from company travel passes issued to black workers and their families.

TWU started the fight for equality in the Northeast but broadened its reach to cities across the country. A transit local

was formed in Miami, where TWU opened a school to train black mechanics who were barred from other vocational schools in the city. A powerful local was formed in Tulsa, where the union rid the American Airlines base of its separate white and black facilities.

In 1962 in Houston, Local 260 uncovered a pattern of racial discrimination in the Pioneer Bus Company. The employer and its independent union had two separate units, one for white drivers and shop workers and the other for blacks, with separate seniority lists for each group. TWU demanded and won, by a 3-to-1 margin, a representation election of the entire group. The Jim Crow hiring pattern died with the first TWU contract.



One of TWU's most enduring moments came in 1961 when Dr. King delivered a keynote address at the 11th International Convention where he praised the union for its dedication to the cause of equal rights and for all people. Thousands of



TWU members participated in the March on Washington in 1963, and proudly joined other civil rights demonstrators in the Selma March in 1965. Three years later, over 2,500 TWU members joined the Poor People's March in Washington, D.C.

Although the nation still struggles with racism and prejudice, TWU has always tried to play a role in the march towards equality for all. In 2008 TWU was the first union to endorse Barack Obama for president and

fully supported Hillary Clinton's historic race for the presidency.



Fighting for Equal Rights for Women

As the women's movement emerged in the 1960s, TWU recognized the need for more protection of women's rights. The union, and individual members, fought against sexual harassment and for maternity leave and childcare for families.

In 1986, Local 234 went on strike and won breakthrough contract language against harassment and discipline. Local 100 won a similar fight two years later by getting a provision in their contract which spelled out the right of employees to be treated with dignity and to be free from harassment.

TWU first won rights for women in 1977 when a Local 101 member won a major court case against National Grid, upholding the New York Human Rights Law which requires private sector employers to furnish disability benefits for pregnancy. Several years later Local 556, representing Southwest Airlines flight attendants, won a four-month maternity leave for female employees. Local 250-A in San Francisco negotiated \$110,000 to fund a study of child care and implement the recommendations of that task force in 1989. Also that year, the union established an Equal Rights and Liberties Committee.

The 2001 TWU Convention established the Civil and Human Rights Department. The department has supported diversity and equality in the workplace and urged members to support legislation like the Employment Non-Discrimination ACT.

A Working Women's Committee was also formed in 2001 as part of the Civil and Human Rights Department, "to ensure equal pay for equal work. To educate women to seek the confidence to run for leadership positions in their unions. And to elevate the awareness of all working women's needs in the workplace and outside the workplace. For TWU women to understand the true meaning of 'Each One Teach One.'"

Today, our Air and Transit Division Working Women's Committees continue the original Women's Committee's mission.

