

# Resolution to Develop the Next Generation of Labor Antiwar Leaders

In 2013 the unionized workforce in America hit a 97 year low. Organized labor in 2015 as a percentage of all workers was just about where it was in 1915 – a century of struggle without any net gain in union density.

The Department of Labor [reports](#) that there are fewer than 15 million union members in a labor force of 134 million workers. Union members constitute just 11.1%, down from a peak of 35% in the 1950s, and in the private sector, just 6.7%. Only 4.4% of young workers, those 16-24, are organized. They constitute just 5.4% of all union members. On a more positive note, those young workers who are under union contract are more likely to join their union than the workforce at large.

As a consequence there are now fewer older workers who participated in the struggles to build the labor movement who can transmit their knowledge and solidaristic culture to newer workers, who are largely unaware of the history of unions and why they came about in the first place. This has led to less empathy for union workers and less public support, compounded by the barrage of anti-union propaganda that permeates the media on top of what is generated directly by employers.

If “the future belongs to the youth”, the future of the labor movement belongs to young workers. As aging leaders look to the future and try to get young members more involved, young worker programs have popped up in many national unions, encouraged by the AFL-CIO, which has recognized the generation gap in the labor movement and established a [Young Worker Advisory Council](#) and programs to address it.

Labor activism among the young has grown modestly in the past few years, though not always through traditional union formations. The Occupy movement, the “Fight for \$15” movement, fast food worker strikes and “Our Walmart” are expressions of this new activism.

The millennial generation comprises more than 80 million people, and by 2025, its members are expected to make up 75 percent of the global workforce.

Those 30-40 years old and younger have lived in a constant state of war for most of their lives. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the Bush v. Gore election, and resulting escalation of warfare have contributed to creating an environment in which war is not just inescapable but appears inevitable. The institution of the all-volunteer armed services has rendered military service invisible to most of the population, while it constitutes an economic draft for millions of young people for whom it appears as the only recourse in the face of unaffordable education, marginal contingent poverty wage jobs or chronic unemployment.

For many coming out of college over the past several years, and for others who entered the workforce directly out of high school, income inequality is not some abstract notion. For the past few years, most workers, young and old, were willing to accept nearly any salary offered to them, since jobs were so scarce. What limited opportunities existed were wiped out by the 2008 crash and recession that followed. Indeed, for youth, this has been a depression not a recession, with unemployment rates for young workers in many African American communities in excess of 50%. Young people feel they’re being left behind or, worse, cheated. Even a college degree is no longer a ticket to a stable job at living wages.

These are the conditions under which US Labor Against the War (USLAW) must grapple with the changes presented by the near future of the labor movement. Just as unions must work consciously and with resolve to develop a new generation of labor activists and leaders, so too must USLAW. A “business as

usual” approach will not suffice. This will require a conscious and focused effort on the part of affiliates, the Steering Committee, liaisons and USLAW supporters.

This Assembly therefore RESOLVES for the creation of a Membership Development and Recruitment Committee that will be responsible for developing new strategies and ways of working that speak to the changing nature of our workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We further RESOLVE, the committee will begin with a comprehensive analysis of work in which USLAW is currently engaged. Based on its analysis, it will present to the Steering Committee proposals for how USLAW can communicate with, engage and involve young workers and make the work of USLAW relevant to the new generation of union members and emerging leaders.

We further RESOLVE, this committee will be comprised of at minimum one co-convenor, one steering committee member, and three members chosen by the National Coordinator with an intake process for more determined at a later date. This committee will be diverse in age, race and gender. It will meet and/or communicate biweekly, and will report to the Steering Committee monthly. The National Coordinator will, in consultation with the Co-convenors, develop the work plan for this committee, as well as prepare periodic written reports on progress being made.

Finally, we RESOLVE that the Steering Committee, Co-Convenors and staff in consultation with this committee will review the By-laws and Mission Statement to determine what changes may be required to support this effort to encourage greater participation by young workers in USLAW.