

*AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka delivered the following remarks in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the national protests that have followed:*

Our nation woke up this morning in profound pain.

Just as we did yesterday and the day before.

Pain from a pandemic that has torn through our country, through our workplaces, through tens of thousands of our families.

Pain from an economic crisis that has cost tens of millions of workers our jobs.

Pain from deeply rooted racial injustice. Injustice baked into our workplaces, our schools and our criminal justice system.

These catastrophes are not coincidences.

These crises are connected. They cannot be separated or dealt with individually.

The coronavirus exploits the health consequences of systemic racism, and the virus rips apart the economy. In turn, mass unemployment adds to and is channeled through racial inequality.

These devastating, dangerous challenges are intertwined. But guess what: so are we.

We are here today to say as a labor movement that our country must come together to fight these three crises.

To stand in solidarity with those whose lives have been so horribly changed by them—not just in this tragic week, not just in this tragic spring, but over years and decades and generations.

We are all connected, so let us speak the names of the lost.

The names of victims whose killers must be brought to justice. Those killers include the officers who didn't protect or serve, but pulled a trigger and pressed a knee into a man's neck.

The killers include a system of racial oppression that is as old as our country and as new as President Trump's latest tweet.

So let us speak their names.

George Floyd.

Ahmaud Arbery.

Breonna Taylor.

David McAtee.

The names do not stop there.

The injustices do not stop with police brutality. The list of victims, the list of grievances, is long.

Racism plays an insidious role in the daily lives of all working people of color.

This is a labor issue because it is a workplace issue. It is a community issue, and unions are the community.

And make no mistake: it is union members on the front lines battling COVID-19 for the communities and the country that we love.

We cannot ignore that so many are people of color. So many fallen essential workers were so young. And so brave.

Let us speak their names, too.

Kendall Nelson, a member of ATU local 825. A New Jersey Transit bus driver who brought people safely home for 28 years.

Detroit Fire Department Captain Franklin D. Williams, Jr. A member of the International Association of Fire Fighters. A man who ran into burning buildings when other people ran out.

Karla Dominguez, a 33-year-old pediatric intensive care nurse at Hospitals of Providence Memorial Campus in El Paso. A member of the National Nurses United. She lovingly referred to her child patients as "her kids."

This week, so many working people said: We have had enough. Enough of the systemic racism.

Enough of the police violence.

Many of us took to the streets. In Minneapolis, an entire community rose up in protest, and the labor movement was proudly a part of that rising.

We saw unionized bus drivers refuse to transport protestors to jail.

We saw our labor bodies organize community networks to support peaceful protest.

And just yesterday, the Minnesota AFL-CIO rightfully called for the resignation of the Minneapolis police union president—who is inflaming community tensions instead of healing them.

Our movement did this because protesting racial brutality—whether at the hands of a police officer or a neighbor or an employer—is not only a righteous cause. It's a responsibility.

It's incumbent upon each and every one of us.

Because as A. Philip Randolph reminded us: "Justice is never given. It is exacted." And "freedom is never a final fact, but a continuing, evolving process."

So let us say today, with a conviction that is unmistakable, Black Lives Matter.

Black. Lives. Matter.

But here's what doesn't matter: when it comes to your dignity, to your right to live a full life, a life free from fear—it should not matter what your race is.

Or how you pray.

Or where you were born.

Or whether you are documented, what your gender identity is, what your sexual orientation is.

None of that matters. We are all children of God.

Two years before the historic March on Washington, Dr. King addressed the Fourth Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO. He shared that day his dream that “all who work for a living will be one, with no thought of their separateness.”

That solidarity is the foundation of the labor movement. In America and around the world.

Late Sunday night, as a peaceful protest in front of the White House ended, the AFL-CIO headquarters was sprayed with graffiti.

Windows were smashed. And a fire engulfed the lobby.

As you can imagine, that was a painful sight to see.

In that building where I am so proud to work are artifacts of the courage and dignity of working people throughout the history of our country.

A mural of immigrant workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, confronting National Guard bayonets.

Photos of autoworkers in the Great Depression, emerging from strikes in triumph.

Women workers in the 1970s demanding equal pay.

Quilts woven with the names of union members killed on September 11th.

My father’s coal lamp is in that building.

I visited the house of labor a few hours later. The damage was heartbreaking.

But it was also a reminder: The labor movement is not a museum.

It is a living, breathing thing. It is a people linked arm in arm in common purpose.

And so on Monday morning, many of those people cleaned up the glass and got back to organizing.

Organizing for justice. For a better future. For profound, systematic change.

Beneath all three of the connected crises we now face—the coronavirus and mass unemployment and racial injustice—beneath all of them is the question of who gets seen. And who gets heard.

And, ultimately, who lives and who dies.

A racist society means workers of color are sent into unsafe workplaces by employers and a government that literally does not see them.

A racist society means that millions are left jobless and uninsured when neither needed to happen.

But our movement sees you.

Our movement fights for you.

Our movement raises a fist beside you, kneels next to you, and links arms with you.

Where do we go from here?

Brothers, sisters and friends, there is no way to uproot what is wrong without profound political change.

Yes, we need to throw the divider in chief out of the White House.

But working people need more than that.

A return to the socially and economically unjust normal is not acceptable.

We need the leaders we elect in their place to use their positions...their power...to dismantle the traditions of oppression in our workplaces, our health system, our housing system, our voting laws, our criminal justice system.

The courage, determination and vision that this moment requires demands leadership that sees, that hears, that understands, and that unites.

That gives no thought to our separateness but sees us instead as we are: as one.

We woke up this morning in pain. Let us turn that pain into resolve. Let us channel our anger and our anguish into action.

That is what the labor movement is determined to do.

That is how, out of this dark moment, we will win a better day.

We will not rest until that day comes.

We will not rest until this nation can finally wake up to equality and justice for all.

Thank you.

May God bless you and keep you safe.