

What rights does labor seek?

The AFL-CIO seeks to guarantee to every American every one of his basic American rights.

This means breaking the vicious circle which condemns a baby born in a segregated neighborhood to a childhood of segregated and sub-standard schools; to an adolescence of mounting discouragement and inadequate training; to an adulthood of joblessness or menial employment. All because of segregation.

The circle has a wider radius. The Negro who breaks through the economic barrier may still find no decent public place to eat, to sleep, to watch a play or film—no place, indeed, to vote.

The denial of rights must be ended, whether the victim suffers all the injustices in the vicious circle, which is the rule, or even only one.

"These wrongs cry for correction," the AFL-CIO said in its convention policy statement on civil rights, "and it is the responsibility of all of us, individually and collectively, to work diligently for that correction." No sudden redemption will overnight dissolve the hate and fear within a racist's heart or give new faith to a householder whose veneer of tolerance cracks at the cry, "The colored are moving in." Laws cannot wipe out prejudice of the spirit; but laws, vigorously enforced, can abolish prejudice in practice. The AFL-CIO seeks the total elimination of racial and religious discrimination from American society—the smashing of the vicious circle—by every possible democratic means.

Can labor achieve these rights?

Yes—but not alone. Labor can play a vital role, but cannot do the job single handed.

Since its formative years the labor movement has sought, with considerable success, to broaden and extend all rights—economic, social and political. Among the first union goals, almost a century and a half ago, was a free, universal public school system. Unions proclaimed the objective. Unions lobbied for it in state legislatures. Union parents took the lead in community movements, organized to promote the cause. But the achievement was possible only because, as a result of labor's efforts, a majority of all the people came to support it.

This was true in the enactment of the civil rights bill; it has even greater truth in its implementation. The AFL-CIO can, should and does provide leadership, exert pressure, serve as a rallying-point for the forces of justice. But the ultimate victory requires the full and united efforts of all people of good will.

