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# Solidarity Forever?: Race, Gender, and Unionism in the Ports of Southern California

*Jake Alimahomed-Wilson*

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The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) remains one of the best examples of a labor union that traces its origins to radical anti-racist principles. Today, very few mainstream unions remain that were founded on militant, radical, and “anti-racist” principles. The ILWU remains the strongest port union in the United States, and its members are among the highest paid blue-collar union workers in the world. Drawing on in-depth interviews, archival oral histories research, and ethnographic observation, *Solidarity Forever?* highlights the struggle of a key group of Black and women leaders who fought for racial and gender equality in the ports of Southern California. The book argues that institutional and cultural forms of racial and gender inequality are embedded within US trade union locals leading to the following deleterious consequences for unions: (1) a proliferation of internal discrimination lawsuits within unions, which can cost the union International, or union local, potentially millions of dollars in legal fees and financial settlements thereby redistributing precious financial resources that could be spent on key activities related to making unions stronger from outside attacks; (2) an erosion of trust and solidarity among workers, the key values of any successful union, which ultimately undermines the radical democratic potential of unions and rank-and-file participation in union politics; and (3) the undermining of workers of color and women workers as full and equal participants in the labor movement. The future of organized labor in the United States could very well be determined by the ability of the labor movement, and labor unions in particular, to listen to those workers who have been relegated to the margins of the global economy—workers of color, immigrant workers, women workers, and all workers in the Global South.

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