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**CBTU Remembrance of Harry Belafonte
April 26, 2023**

The name Harry Belafonte ricocheted around the world yesterday when news that he had died was announced by his family in New York. The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists joins the millions who grieve Harry Belafonte's passing. But what a remarkable man! He rose from working class Harlem, New York, to become a global icon who never compromised his integrity or bit his tongue when speaking truth to power.

Mr. Belafonte used his enormous celebrity as a barrier-breaking entertainer to support and elevate people and movements fighting for social justice and equality around the world. He bailed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., out of a Birmingham jail in 1963; he supported voting registration drives in the south; he helped organize the 1963 March on Washington; and he vehemently opposed the U.S. government's blockade of Cuba. Mr. Belafonte was a relentless critic of the apartheid regime in South Africa and he raised funds for the Free South Africa Movement here in this country.

Lesser known, however, is Mr. Belafonte's steadfast support for workers' rights. Often, his songs told stories of the hardships and hopes of low-wage workers. He once said of one of his most popular hits, Day-O, "When people sing and delight and dance and love it, they don't really understand unless they study the song, that they are singing a work song, that's a song of rebellion."

Mr. Belafonte never forgot his working class roots. He became close friends with revered labor leader and CBTU co-founder Cleve Robinson. It was Brother Robinson who gave Mr. Belafonte his first singing job. He was among those who paid tribute to Cleve at his funeral in 1995. "Cleve taught me that art that did not serve humans and civil rights was not art at all."

Mr. Belafonte also had a close relationship with CBTU President Emeritus William "Bill" Lucy. Their paths crossed many times in many struggles, especially around U.S. foreign policy in Africa and Cuba. In 1999, when Josephine LeBeau, who chaired the William Lucy Tribute Committee, asked Mr. Belafonte to be one of the emcees for a gala dinner honoring Mr. Lucy, he quickly accepted "Anything for Bill. Just tell me when and where."

President Emeritus Lucy said he was deeply saddened by the passing of his dear friend and ally. "Harry was one of a kind. His word was gold. His passion for doing the right thing was deeply appreciated by those who were fortunate to stand with him. He was a good, good guy. He identified with what we were doing in CBTU and across the labor movement. My condolences go out to his daughter, Sheri, and the rest of his family."

CBTU President Terrence L. Melvin echoed his mentor's sentiments. "The world has lost one of the greatest warriors for peace and justice and human rights. Harry Belafonte was family to CBTU members. We will miss him profoundly."