

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **BACK TOGETHER!**

### **CBTU Says It's Time for Black Workers to Convene**

51st CBTU International Convention Will Be Hosted in Los Angeles, May 25-30



When the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists hosts its first in-person convention in two years in Los Angeles, May 25-30, 2022, delegates will convene in a scary yet partially promising landscape. This week CBTU announced the program for its 51st International Convention at the Westin Bonaventure hotel (404 Figueroa St.). **President Joe Biden** will deliver a special video message to more than 800 delegates and guests on Thursday, May 26th. Following President Biden, **Rep. Ro Khanna (D-17)** will be the featured keynote speaker before CBTU President

**Terrence L. Melvin** delivers his much-anticipated report on the state of Black trade unionism in 2022. Melvin, who will celebrate his 10th anniversary as CBTU president at this convention, offered a stark assessment of the national climate for this gathering:

“Black workers, Black communities, Black women, Black youth, Black seniors, Black incarcerated men women are under siege from all directions. Our very humanity is in peril – stoked by anti-black racism and by the monstrous Big Lie of a stolen presidential election. We must come together – now – in this embattled landscape to affirm our beautiful humanity and to lead the way out of these dark, dark days. True, our plate is full, but we come to L.A. ready work.”

Melvin, who is also Secretary-Treasurer of the New York AFL-CIO, said the run-up to the midterm elections would be front and center. “Everything is on the ballot in November,” he declared. “Voting rights, civil rights, women’s reproductive freedom, control of Congress and statehouses across the country. The January 6th insurrection showed the world that the Radical Right has decided to take down democracy in order to hold onto power by any means necessary. CBTU will lead Black trade unionists toward developing an aggressive voter turnout strategy with our allies to counter this dangerous and reactionary power grab. **Our message to ambivalent voters will be blunt: if they win, they get more power to do more harm to more Black and brown people and to the nation. It can get worse and it will get worse, if we don’t show up in November.**”

A cross-current of positive and negative labor trends underpin this year’s CBTU convention. Melvin noted, “All over the country, workers are rising up to form unions – from Starbucks to Amazon to hospitals, classrooms and even basketball courts.”

(more)

"No longer are they willing to settle for crumbs and crushing work schedules. Their courage, creativity and enthusiasm challenge us and the entire labor movement to meet the moment."

**Yet, according to federal labor statistics Black union numbers are at a record low, falling by 50,000 since 2019. Less than 2 million Black workers are in unions now (1.9 million). As a result, the Black union rate dipped to 11.5 percent in 2021.**

Melvin called this steep pandemic drop in Black union membership "a crisis we must confront, not merely explain." He said CBTU will launch a membership recruitment drive at the convention. "In 2022, every CBTU member can be a recruiter. There is a generational opportunity here to grow CBTU and rebuild the power of the labor movement. We intend to leave this convention prepared to recruit and amplify the voice of Black workers at the national, state and local level."

The convention journey this year of one of CBTU's legends will be unique and memorable. **CBTU President Emeritus William "Bill" Lucy** will take his first train ride to a CBTU convention. His cross-country journey will begin in Washington, DC, with stops along the way where he will be joined by other guest riders. Mr. Lucy's longtime friend and author and legendary businessman, Chris Gardner, will join him in Chicago and will accompany him to Los Angeles. Gardner, who has a close 25-year relationship with CBTU, overcame homelessness in San Francisco to raise a toddler son. Eventually, his heroic story became a Hollywood blockbuster, "The Pursuit of Happyness".

Mr. Lucy, who will turn 89 years old in November – **eighty-nine!** -- is the last living founder of CBTU. He retired as president in 2012 after 40 years at the helm of the organization that he lifted to international prominence with his visionary leadership. Although "officially" retired, Mr. Lucy is still the most revered and sought-after Black labor leader in the world. Melvin, who Mr. Lucy tapped as his successor to lead CBTU, said, "Bill Lucy's presence will be a special blessing for members who attend this convention. He is a living legend who brings so much Black joy whenever he enters a room."

CBTU was founded in 1972 and is the largest independent labor organization representing the views and values of 1.9 million Black trade unionists in the United States and Canada. There are 50 different international and national trade unions represented in CBTU and there are more than 50 chapters in the U.S. and Ontario, Canada.

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**For more information about the 2022 convention, visit our website [www.cbtu51st.info](http://www.cbtu51st.info) and follow CBTU on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.**