

Introduction

Richard Parrish, teacher and labor leader, devoted much of his life to civil rights activities. As a teacher in New York City, he belonged to both the local and national teachers' unions, holding office and working for civil rights within the unions and educational system. Parrish also became an officer in black labor organizations such as the National Afro-American Labor Council and the Negro Labor Committee. These groups strived to end discrimination in the labor movement and cooperated with other civil rights efforts to promote social and political as well as economic equality in the United States.

After joining the New York City school system in 1947, Parrish became a member and officer of the New York Teachers' Guild and the subsequent local union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). He served as vice president and assistant treasurer of the UFT and was a member of its executive board from the union's inception in 1960 until 1970. In addition, Parrish became a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the national union.

At the 1956 AFT convention, Parrish successfully concluded the fight for the ouster of segregated AFT locals. In 1963 he led a contingent of teachers and students to Prince Edward County, Virginia, where the local school board had closed the public schools rather than integrate. In 1964 the AFT expanded this Freedom School concept to include the Deep South. Parrish served as chairman of the union's Civil Rights Committee and acted as liaison between the schools and the national office. He also chaired the AFT's 1966 conference on "Racism in Education." During the New York City teachers' strike of 1968, Parrish formed the UFT Black Caucus. In 1970 the AFT Black Caucus was established with Parrish serving as its chairman from 1970 to 1973. Other teachers' organizations of which Parrish was an officer included the Community Teachers Association (CTA) and the United Black Caucus of Teachers. He was a founder and president of the CTA from 1956 to 1965 and also chaired the United Black Caucus of Teachers in the early 1970s.

Parrish also was active in black labor organizations. He served as treasurer of the National Afro-American Labor Council (NALC) from 1960 to 1974, when he became president. A 1970 conference of labor and civil rights groups, sponsored by the NALC, led to the creation of the United Black Coalition for Jobs in the Construction Industry; Parrish cochaired the conference and the subsequent organization. He also was a member of the Negro Labor Committee (NLC), holding the office of coordinator and heading the committee for the Frank R. Crosswaith scholarship award program. Parrish was a member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and served on the advisory board of the JFK Library for Minorities. In addition to his activities in civil rights and labor groups and work as a teacher, Parrish unsuccessfully ran for New York state comptroller in 1949 and the New York City Council in 1963 on the Socialist Party ticket.

Parrish was born on August 9, 1914, in Wildwood, New Jersey, and moved with his parents, Cora Elizabeth Flowers Parrish and Leslie Franklin Parrish, to New York City the following year. Graduating from high school during the Great Depression, Parrish worked as a clerk in the Navy Department and became active in labor organizations. Returning to school, he graduated from City College in 1947 with a degree in economics. He taught in the New York City school system from 1947 until his retirement in 1976.

National Afro-American Labor Council (NALC)

By the late 1950s the civil rights movement in the United States was in full bloom. The Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 and the success of the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama in 1956 had led to the emergence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a charismatic leader and to a new awareness of the effectiveness of protest politics in the black community. A militant grass-roots campaign led by established black organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) spread throughout the country in order to eradicate discrimination and segregation in American society.

Industry and “Jim Crow” unions, however, continued to deny fair employment opportunities to black workers in spite of an alliance between black leaders and the national labor unions in the civil rights movement. In 1959, A. Philip Randolph, vice president of the AFL-CIO and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, thought that labor was not moving fast and effectively enough to address the grievances of black workers. Pointing to what he called a “moral revolution” among these workers—a spontaneous surge forward to gain full social and economic status in labor and industry—Randolph called for a conference of seventy-five black trade-union leaders in July 1959 to “consider the problems confronting the 1,500,000 negroes who are members of organized labor.” The founding convention of the Negro American Labor Council (the original name of the organization, later changed in 1968) was held on May 27–29, 1960, in Detroit.

According to the NALC constitution, the purpose of the organization was to seek equality of opportunity in industry and to remove discrimination in trade unions as well as to serve as a clearinghouse for black grievances and interests within the AFL-CIO. The NALC initiated and participated with the SCLC, the NAACP, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in the 1963 March on Washington. It can also be credited with the adoption of better racial trade-union practices within the AFL-CIO. In February 1961 the organization held the Workshop and Institute on Racial Bias in Trade Unions, Industry, and Government in Washington, DC, which was cosponsored and attended by prominent persons such as Roy Wilkins, president of the NAACP, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and King. In addition, the NALC organized various economic conferences.

During its existence the NALC claimed a membership of over ten thousand nationally and a network of over thirty chapters across the country. Randolph, a founding member, served as its president from 1960 until 1966. He was succeeded by Cleveland Robinson, president of the Distributive Workers of America, and in 1974 by Richard Parrish, a founding member and the treasurer from its inception. Other leading members of the NALC included L. Joseph Overton, secretary from 1960 to 1970; Joseph R. Brown, treasurer since 1974; Oliver Montgomery, secretary since 1970; and Willoughby Abner, Joseph A. Beavers, and Lola Belle Holmes. The NALC ceased its operations in 1976.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

The AFT is the national teachers’ union affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Its civil rights activities included the establishment of Freedom Schools in the Deep South in 1964 and the sponsorship of a 1966 conference entitled “Racism in Education.” Dissatisfaction with some of the

policies of the union led to a walkout by five hundred delegates at the AFT's 1970 convention and the subsequent creation of the AFT Black Caucus. In 1971 the United Action Caucus was formed and members of the Black Caucus were urged to join. Both groups desired greater democracy in the union as well as in the American educational system and took stands on economic, social, and political issues.

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the New York City local of the AFT, was established in 1960 when the New York Teachers' Guild and the Committee for Action through Unity merged. In 1963 a UFT-sponsored contingent of teachers and students established in Prince Edward County, Virginia, the first Freedom School. The accord of black and white members of the union, however, was disrupted by the community control issue and the 1968 teachers' strike. The UFT Black Caucus, founded at this time, attempted to open a dialog between the two groups and to encourage greater black participation and responsibility in the union.

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU)

The CBTU was formed when the AFL-CIO's leadership declared its neutrality in the 1972 presidential election. Although black caucuses existed in many unions, for the first time these groups coordinated their efforts in order to register voters and solicit support for Senator George McGovern. This organization, based in Washington, DC, and representing as many as forty-five unions, continues to take positions on social, economic, and political issues.

Community Teachers' Association (CTA)

The CTA, affiliated with the Federation of Negro Civil Service Organizations, was a local black teachers' group dedicated to improving educational standards in neighborhood schools. Founded in 1956 and originally known as the Negro Teachers' Association, the CTA helped win an open enrollment policy for victims of segregated schools and initiated a tutorial program in 1964.

JFK Library for Minorities

The JFK Library for Minorities was formed in 1970 in Brooklyn, New York, as an educational corporation to collect and provide information about American history and government to minority groups.

National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA is a professional organization representing over one million teachers. Although the national organization is not affiliated with any union, in the 1960s and 1970s some NEA locals merged with AFT locals. The first state-level merger occurred in New York in 1972.

Negro Labor Committee (NLC)

The NLC was founded in 1935 by Frank R. Crosswaith at a conference of trade unionists. This organization, with Crosswaith as its long-term chairman, consisted of member unions that selected delegates to the NLC's assembly. The NLC encouraged blacks to join the labor

movement and promoted equality of responsibility and benefits for all union members. With its headquarters at the Harlem Labor Center, the NCL was a focal point for community and nonpartisan political activities in Harlem. In the 1960s the organization, headed by Robert Russell, sponsored the Riverside Park housing project in West Harlem.

United Black Caucus of Teachers

The United Black Caucus of Teachers was founded in 1970 as a local teachers' organization, not affiliated with any labor groups or political party. It aimed to become a political force by working to prevent discrimination and to improve the educational system for the black community.

United Black Coalition for Jobs in the Construction Industry

The United Black Coalition for Jobs in the Construction Industry was an outgrowth of an NALC-sponsored conference of forty labor and civil rights organizations in 1970. The group worked for the enforcement of and compliance with equal opportunity laws in the building trades.