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## WTO — 10 years later

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Ten years ago on Nov. 30, 50,000 people protested a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington. The protests succeeded in delaying the summit's opening day, and contributed to the collapse of plans for a new round of trade negotiations. It was one of those rare moments in history when ordinary people rise up and can no longer be ignored. It was the week of protest, and a coming-out party for a broad-based movement to oppose the "business-first" model of globalization.

In Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere, union, environmental and community activists will take time in the coming weeks to remember the protests and strategize how to carry forward the "spirit of Seattle."

Before the Seattle protests, few people had ever heard of the WTO, a secretive organization that promotes and enforces multi-national trade agreements. But the world public was increasingly aware that growth in worldwide trade was not benefiting workers or the environment.

WTO didn't create the offshoring of U.S. manufacturing jobs. Trade bal-



Photos courtesy of  
David Groves



ances were tilting in China's direction long before that country joined the WTO, for example. And Mexico had begun creating duty-free "maquiladora" export-processing zones in the 1960s. But the WTO served to "grease the skids," by lowering tariff and "non-tariff" barriers to trade.

"The WTO is like a slow motion coup d'état," Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, told the Labor Press. "It's the main delivery mechanism for the model of corporate globalization we've seen implemented in the last couple decades. And it imposes policies that go way beyond trade: deregulation, privatization, and promotion of offshoring to countries with the lowest wages."

Since 1947, nations had committed, in the multilateral agreement known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), to gradually lower tariffs and quotas for manufactured goods and some commodities. [Tariffs — taxes on imports — are a tool countries use to protect domestic industries from foreign competition.] At a meeting in Uruguay in 1986, GATT-signatory nations began negotiating an agreement

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## The face of unions grows more diverse over last 25 years

A new study has found that the face of the labor movement has changed dramatically over the past 25 years.

In 1983, more than half of all union workers were white men, few union workers had a college degree and nearly one-third were in manufacturing. Today, almost half are women, more than one-third have college degrees, and only one in 10 work in manufacturing.

"The Changing Face of Labor, 1983-2008," released this month by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), shows the union movement is more diverse than 25 years ago. The makeup of union members reflects similar shifts in the overall workforce.

"The view that the typical union worker is a white male manufacturing worker may have been correct a quarter of a century ago, but it's not an accurate description of those in today's labor movement," said CEPR senior economist John Schmitt, one of the report's authors. "The unionized workforce is changing with the country. The fastest growing groups in the overall economy are also the fastest growing groups in the labor movement."

The AFL-CIO's new leadership team has made a priority of reaching out to the new faces of workers. Speaking at the AFL-CIO National Summit on Diversity in Pittsburgh in September, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said the federation's commitment to diversity is on its way to becoming a reality.

"I'm here to tell you that we must change," Trumka said. "That

is why we're seeking out and encouraging young people, people of color, people of all backgrounds and beliefs and sexual orientation. These are the labor leaders of tomorrow."

According to the study, the typical union member is 45 years old, compared with 41 for the typical American worker. That's seven years older than a quarter-century ago. The most heavily unionized group was workers 55 to 64 — 18.4 percent of them were in unions. The least unionized age group was 16- to 24-year-olds (5.7 percent were in unions.)

Women now make up more than 45 percent of unionized workers, up from just 35 percent in 1983. By 2020, women will be the majority of union workers.

Liz Shuler, the newly elected secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, told the New York Times that the rise in female membership was encouraging. "It shows that the diversity initiatives we've been pushing have made a difference. Unions have been pushing hard to open their doors," said Shuler, 39, a member of Portland-based IBEW Local 125 and the first woman elected to a top post of the AFL-CIO.

Among other findings in the CEPR study:

- More than one-third of union workers have a four-year college degree or more, up from only one in five in 1983. Nearly half of union women have at least a four-year college degree.

- A little more than half (52 percent) of union members are professional and technical workers.

- Just under half (48.9 percent) of unionized workers are in the public sector, up from slightly more than one-third (34.4 percent) in 1983. Some 61 percent of unionized women are in the public sector, compared to 38 percent for men.

- Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the union movement. In 2008, they represented 12.2 percent of the union workforce, up from 5.8 percent in 1983.

- Asian Americans make up 4.6 percent of the union workforce in 2008, an increase from 2.5 percent in 1989.

- African American workers are about 13 percent of the total unionized workforce, a share that has held fairly steady since 1983.

Over the last quarter century, unionization rates have fallen across every part of the country. However, in recent years, Schmitt and co-author Kris Warner found moderate growth in union membership in the Pacific states — Oregon, Washington, Alaska, California and Hawaii (up from 17.6 percent in 2006 to 19.9 percent in 2008).

In 2008, unionization rates were highest in the Northeast at 20.3 percent. The Midwest, after experiencing the largest regional drop in unionization in percentage-point terms since 1983, had a 15.5 percent unionization rate in 2008. The unionization rate was substantially lower in the West (10.7 percent) and the South (7.2 percent).