

Working Together for Unity Among Unions, the Environmental Movements, and All People

Our goal is to broaden and strengthen both labor and environmental organizations in our efforts to ensure a sustainable future.

As union activists we know that workers, labor leaders, and climate justice activists share common goals and face common obstacles to achieving them. We want to work together with climate justice activists to overcome the obstacles and understand and improve the connections between workers' issues and stopping climate change.

To build the broadest possible unity, the work on climate change must not exclude or be at the expense of workers in the impacted industries. We have to support and engage workers and communities whose income depends on the extraction of fossil fuels. A tactic used to divide our movements is to tell workers to "choose" between good jobs and a healthy environment. In reality we all need meaningful and life-supporting work as well as a sustainable planet for ourselves and future generations.

Unions around the world are using the concept of "just transition" to organize, educate, and form alliances to create systemic change for a sustainable future. To make a "just transition," workers will have to participate in all decisions that affect their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Many environmental groups are backing union efforts to support workers during the transition from fossil fuels.

Divisions abound and can be difficult to overcome. Underlying them is a system of oppression that uses classism, racism, sexism, and many other forms of oppression to confuse people, including working people and social justice activists, and distract them from their true connection and power. Heads of governments are exacerbating the divisions as they pursue policies that increase inequality.

In *Sustaining All Life/United to End Racism*, we've learned that we can heal from how we've been hurt by oppression and that doing so strengthens our work. We know that we have to handle the internalized oppression—the negative messages about ourselves and other oppressed people that we sometimes believe and act out. By healing ourselves we can think better about how classism, racism, sexism, and other oppressions affect our movements and the broader society and can heal the divisions in our relationships, organizations, and movements. Healing from oppression is not a substitute for taking action against it, but it is a vital part of the work to end all forms of oppression.

By releasing, in a supportive network, the distressed feelings caused by oppression, we can become more hopeful, flexible, and committed and better connected to all people. This will enable us to build mightier, more united movements that sustain all life and provide for everyone.



The Work of Sustaining All Life and United to End Racism

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed if this is to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism** believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people within nations, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness among the populations of many countries, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of capitalism. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these issues and others.

The role of oppression

Our societies are based on exploitation and oppression demanding growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the Earth. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting out oppression, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

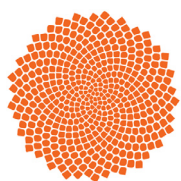
The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies by oppression interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist it or we may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.

* *Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end climate change within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved.



Sustaining All Life

For more information, see:
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