

As more than 55 percent of Black people in the U.S. live in the South, a strong labor movement becomes a key base of power in the struggle for democratic control, for African-American self-determination and against global capitalism and imperialism.

Even after the victory of passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, won mainly through mass protests, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood by his support of the Memphis sanitation workers that a Poor Peoples Campaign needed workers' power to help make impacting demands on the forces that control the economy and all levels of government.



The program of the MWMM is applicable for today's struggles and for building rank-and-file democratic social movement unionism embodying new trade union activists coming forward in this period. However, in order to build the initial rank-and-file infrastructure for consolidating this tendency, the MWMM must better organize and institutionalize its core network.

As capitalism's strategy for resolving the crisis has always been to make some concessions to sections and layers of the working class, based on the imperialist culture and social system of white supremacy, it is important that a program to promote and build the unity of the working class must be developed around and led by the most exploited and oppressed sections of the working class.

*Black Workers Take the Lead!*

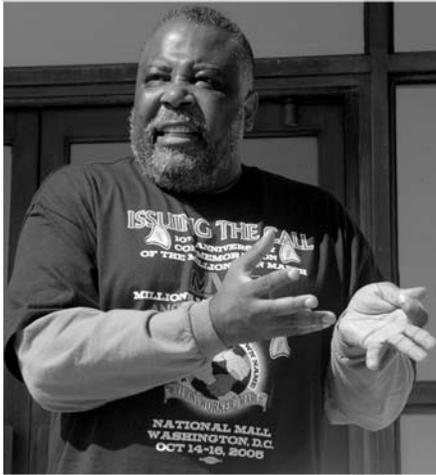


# BLACK WORKERS

## *A Call to Action for Rank-and-File Democratic Social Movement Unionism!*



Photo: Delores Thomas



**A Black Left Unity Network BLUN  
Labor Working Group Discussion Paper**

**Contact: Saladin Muhammad,  
Convener of the BLUN Labor Working Group**

**saladin62@aol.com**

**www.Blackleftunity.org**

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**African-American and labor alliance needed to challenge capital**

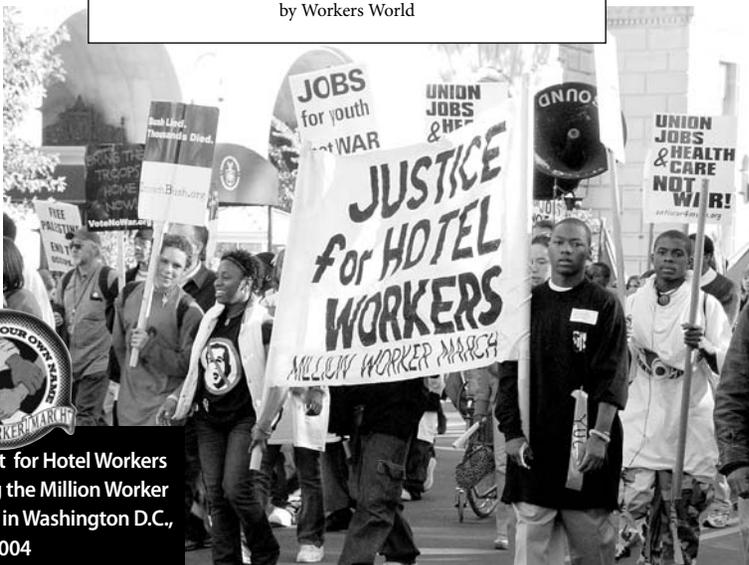
The current stage of the capitalist economic crisis and the role of the state in weakening and trying to dismantle trade unions to protect the dominance of capital make the unity between labor and the social movements of the most oppressed critically important for the survival and expansion of organized labor's shrinking base.

Forging an African-American and labor alliance is crucial for building the wider multinational unity that is needed to effectively challenge capital on its many fronts. This includes the struggles for human rights and African-American self-determination.

The struggle for human rights — for self-determination and democratic control over the political system, over the most important aspects of the economy, and over the social institutions that impact the lives of the millions of working-class and

oppressed peoples — must be seen as a transitional program that better aligns and positions the social movements for a more revolutionary change.

Organizing a strong labor movement in the U.S. South — a historical and continuing failure by the U.S. labor movement that undermines labor's strength as a national movement — must become a major focus of social movement unionism and the struggle for democratic control. The majority of the foreign direct investment in the U.S. is concentrated in the South, making it a strategic center in the global economy.



**Protest for Hotel Workers during the Million Worker March in Washington D.C., Oct., 2004**



of racist attacks on Obama. This is designed to derail and split the unity of the working class, which the scope and scale of the capitalist crisis are objectively forging.

This is one reason why it is important that this emerging rank-and-file

movement must be anti-racist, against all forms of social oppression, and independent of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Black rank-and-file trade union activists, especially the Black left, must be an active and visible part of this debate.

The EGT struggle is an example of forging this unity. ILWU Local 21, representing the workers at the Longview Port, is predominately white with a conservative history. However, ILWU Local 10, a majority Black local union with respect throughout the U.S. labor movement, was the first to step forward to support and to help build the ILWU's wide and growing national support for this struggle.

The fact that the EGT struggle has emerged at this stage of the capitalist crisis, and when there is a popular movement challenging the rule and policies of the 1%, makes it more than a single, narrow economic trade union struggle. It represents and symbolizes an important front in the struggle against capital — an understanding that must be part of the politicizing of today's struggles.

The EGT struggle will have a decisive effect on the power, direction and tactics of the U.S. labor movement and the working-class struggle. We should expect to see major efforts by ILWU national business unionists to split the ILWU rank and file from the growing solidarity that can strengthen the fightback against the EGT — and against the entire capitalist class that backs EGT's drive to break the ILWU and ultimately destroy the organized labor movement. This is a critical struggle that, depending on its outcome, could be either a decisive turning point that emboldens labor or just the opposite.



The Occupy Wall Street movement has drawn major attention to the rule by the capitalist 1% over the 99%. However, for many, especially within the working class, the role of Wall Street as a center of finance capital has little if any direct meaning in their daily lives.

The early OWS protests and encampments were important media attractions showing a growing alienation and resistance by mainly white middle-class forces whose social privileges are now under attack by the 1%. They help to point out the scale and scope of the economic crisis, while not necessarily the depth. These protests also did not reflect the real power within the 99% to directly challenge the main economic base of the capitalist 1% — the points of production and service.

With the entry of labor and social movement activists especially from working-class Black and oppressed nationality communities, OWS began to take on targets, demands and tactics that rely on mobilizing the organized power of the working class and its most marginalized sectors.

The leadership by the Transport Workers Union Local 100 in New York, a trade union whose membership is 80 percent workers of color, and International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 in San Francisco, Calif., with a Black-worker-majority membership, were central to influencing labor's involvement in the OWS movement and in helping to transform aspects of the OWS class and people of color character in New York, Oakland and other cities.



Rank-and-file members and activists within TWU Local 100 and ILWU Local 10 who pushed for their union's involvement in OWS were also members of the Million Workers March Movement. In 2004, ILWU Local 10 initiated the call and national organizing for a Million Worker March that mobilized 15,000 rank-and-file trade unionists, the unorganized and the unemployed on Oct. 4 at the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C.

When looking at the actions of Occupy Oakland, it is important to remember that the social consciousness for resistance by Black people and the working class in Oakland was also partly shaped by the Black Liberation movement represented by the Black Panther Party that was born and headquartered in Oakland.

The BPP promoted the struggle against capitalism. They called for placing human needs over profits, opposition to state repression and for international solidarity. Some of the members of the ILWU Local 10 were members of the Oakland chapter of the BPP.

ILWU Local 10's port shutdowns in opposition to South African apartheid, for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, for justice for Oscar Grant, and in support of labor rights for public sector workers in Wisconsin also draw on this history of resistance in the Bay Area.

It is part of the continuing and further shaping of ILWU Local 10's tradition and view that the social demands and movements of the working class and the oppressed must also be taken up as part of the demands and actions of the labor movement. This has established ILWU Local 10 as the conscience of the ILWU national union and in many ways of the U.S. labor movement.

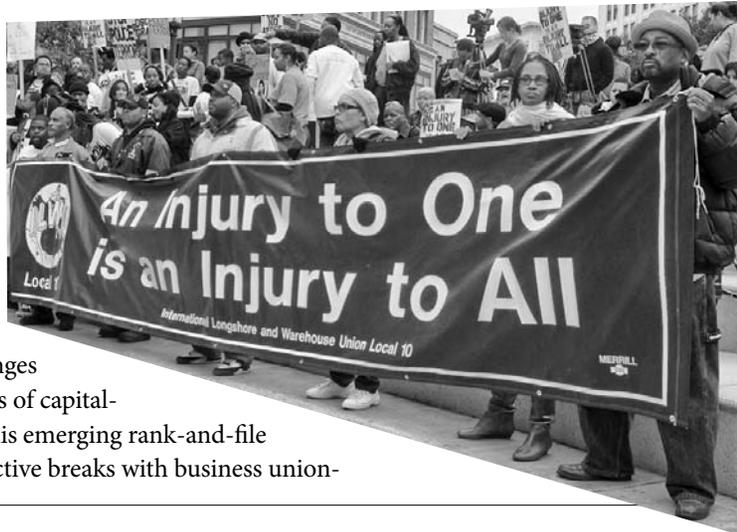
TWU Local 100 that defied New York State's anti-union Taylor Law in 2005 by striking before the Christmas holidays — impacting production because thousands were unable to get to work and disrupting the most profitable period for sales in the city where Wall Street is headquartered — gave special meaning to Local 100 as the first union in New York to publicly announce support and mobilize for OWS.

Because rank-and-file trade unionists and social movement activists have intervened in the Occupy movement and directed it to focus on targets and struggles against housing foreclosures and in defense of public education and worker rights, among others, the role of Wall Street in the deteriorating conditions impacting the working class and the oppressed communities has become much clearer.

### Emerging rank-and-file class-struggle perspective breaks with business unionism

The Dec. 12 blockades of the West Coast ports linked the demand for the right of peaceful protest for OWS and social movements to ILWU's struggle against the EGT grain export terminal in Longview, Wash., in defense of labor rights for truckers in Los Angeles and longshore workers in Longview. The driving force behind EGT is a major U.S.-based international corporation Bunge LTD, whose 2010 profits were \$2.4 billion.

This has made Oakland, a part of the Bay Area which includes San Francisco, not only a flashpoint of the Occupy movement, but a catalyst for the emerging rank-and-file social movement unionism that challenges the forces and policies of capitalism in this period. This emerging rank-and-file class-struggle perspective breaks with business union-



ism that separates labor struggles from the wider struggles and social movements of the working class. This must also be seen as an important development for the Black Liberation movement.

Business unionism defines the parameters and scope of working-class militancy and struggle by the union contract. In doing so, it restricts the tactics and scope of the trade unions in struggles against capital around social and political issues and international solidarity that affects the working class and oppressed people in the U.S. and internationally.

Like the demand for regulation of the banks, utilities and corporations, the union contract should be viewed and used as an instrument by the workers {to restrain the exploitation of workers by capital }of capital) with core assurances for the working class, not something that holds workers hostage to the dictates of capital.

The West Coast port shutdowns have triggered an important and growing debate within the labor movement, and among some identified as labor's left intelligentsia, about so-called rules and parameters of the working-class and social movement struggles against capital where the workers have unions.

This debate, while not a new one, is taking place in a new period that represents the worst economic and social crisis since the Great Depression and one of the sharpest attacks on trade unions and labor rights since the period following the Reagan administration's attack on the airline traffic controllers.

It is also taking place in a period where various sections of the capitalist ruling class have been able to finance and use the election of a Black president as a double-edged sword. One section recognized the fragmentation within the Black Freedom movement and the Black working class and financed the campaign to elect a Black president to project an image of the U.S. Empire as having achieved post-racialism. This strategy seeks to hold back the development of massive national Black resistance as a powerful social force in this period of capitalist crisis.

The other section financed and fostered a racist and neo-fascist popular movement in the form of the Tea Party, whose attacks against the government take the form

