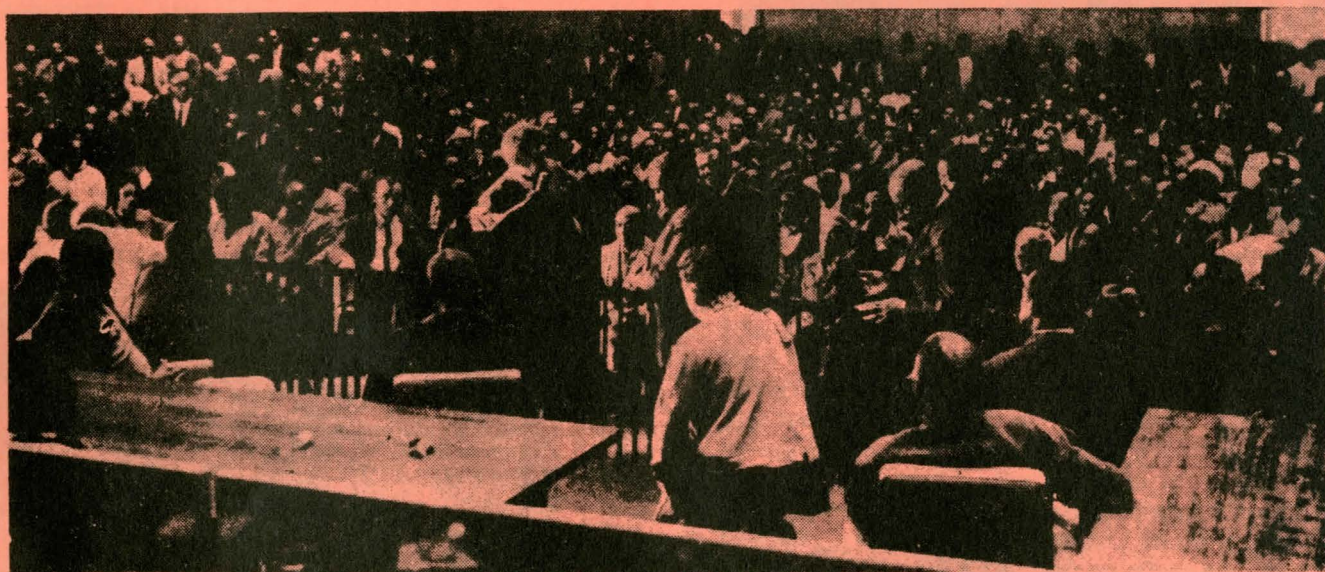


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MEMPHIS WORKERS FIGHT

The City Sanitation Workers' Strike

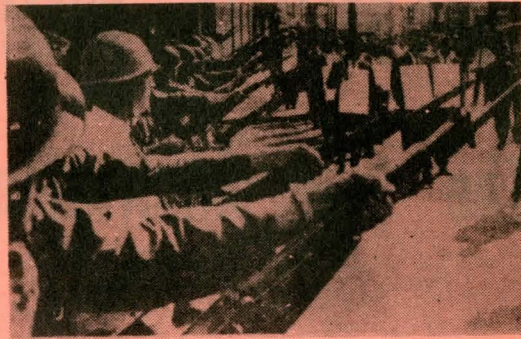
Fred Lacey



Crowded solidarity meeting during the height of the sanitationmen's strike.

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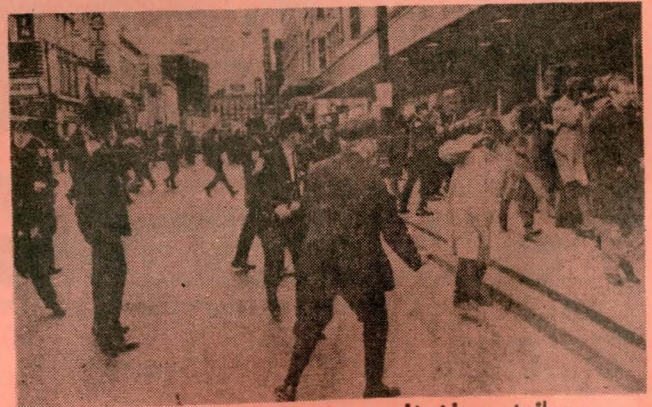
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Guardsmen try to intimidate strikers.



Early strike march through Memphis.



Police spray mace on sanitation strikers.



Junior Chamber of Commerce scabs.



Sanitation Strike Background

MEMPHIS WORKERS FIGHT

by Fred Lacey

A TITANIC union struggle was fought in the city of Memphis, Tenn. Defying a court injunction demanding their return, city sanitation workers stayed out on strike for 65 days. They braved police terror that included mass arrests and the widespread use of Mace, tear gas, and police clubs. And they defeated a city administration that brought in scabs by the truckload from the bordering states of Mississippi and Arkansas.

The strike began on February 12 in the wake of the sanitation workers' strike in New York City, and was sparked by a typical action of job discrimination against Black workers, who make up over 1,300 of the city's 1,600 sanitation workers. That rainy morning a large number of Black workers were sent home, while a smaller group of favorites, including white workers, were told to stay by the trucks. Later, the weather cleared and those who had remained got in a full day's work. The workers sent home demanded that the city pay them for the lost day, but the administration refused, offering only two hour's pay. This, together with rotten working conditions, was more than the men would take. They walked out on strike.

Some of those working conditions that led to the strike included: (1) no bathrooms, washrooms, or showering facilities in which to clean up after work, and no protective work clothing, which meant that the men had to go home in the same clothes they had been working in all day; (2) no place for the men to eat lunch, a situation that one worker described as "having a sandwich in one hand and a garbage can in

the other"; (3) job discrimination against Black workers, who were consistently denied job promotions; (4) no pension or retirement system.

Early in January of this year, two men were crushed to death by a defective packer in their truck. They had to go inside the garbage cylinder of the truck to get the packer functioning, and while in there the packer caught and crushed them to death against the back wall of the cylinder. The men's families received a "gift" from the city of \$500 for "burial expenses," and one month's pay. Nothing more. Sanitation workers were not listed as regular city workers, and therefore did not qualify for workmen's compensation.

Wages were another factor causing the strike. The city preferred older men with families for the job, and paid them 5 cents over the minimum wage to start, with the maximum wage rate set at \$1.80 per hour. This pay scale, averaging from \$53 to \$60 a week after taxes, came nowhere near to supporting the men's families. Before the strike forty percent of the sanitation workers needed welfare checks in addition to their pay to sustain them. Many more were on the food stamp program as well.

Memphis is one of the many big southern cities that the freedom movement never really organized. But there is no question that the battles of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, and the early Memphis sit-ins had a major impact on the city's Black workers. Their response to this tide was to attempt to organize against what was oppressing them the most. For the sanitation workers it began in 1963 when they threatened a strike. Another strike was planned in 1966. But on both occasions the city immediately got an injunction against

Fred Lacey is a member of the Progressive Labor Party in the South and this article was written while on an organizing tour.

the threatened strike, fired the most militant workers, and promised to fire any man who dared to walk out on strike. Though these tactics were successful then, working conditions remained the same, and in 1968 the men were ready to fight.

One reason for this new militancy is a man named T. O. Jones. He was fired by the city in 1963, after six years on the job, for leading the workers to strike. Later that year he was hired by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to continue organizing among his former co-workers. Four years later, he and many other fighters still on the job had succeeded in their organizing work.

Strike: The Opening Guns

On the first day of the strike, T. O. Jones appeared with a committee of sanitation workers at the office of the director of public works demanding a pay increase and action on many of the intolerable job conditions. When the director refused to commit himself to improving the conditions or raising wages, and insisted that the strike was illegal under the 1966 injunction, T. O. Jones pulled out a brown paper bag, took off his dress clothes in the director's office, and put on what he called his "jail clothes." He then announced that they could throw him in jail if they wanted to, but that the strike was definitely on.

The next night, Mayor Henry Loeb addressed a union meeting of over 800 striking workers. He told them that this was not New York City and that "nothing will be gained by violating our laws." He also said that the walkout was posing a grave "health menace to the city." The men laughed at him. He sternly told them to go back to work and then there would be negotiations. The men laughed at him again and shouted "No! No!," then booed him off the stage and out of the meeting.

The strikers began holding daily marches through downtown Memphis and nightly mass meetings to rally support, a practice kept up for the length of the strike. They also formulated their demands, which included: (1) an end to job discrimination against Black workers; (2) a city-paid hospitalization, life insurance, and pension program; (3) additional sick leave, vacation improvements, overtime after 8 hours in any particular day, and premium pay of 10

cents an hour for night work; (4) a guarantee of a full work week even in bad weather; (5) wage increases of 40 cents an hour; (6) recognition of the union as sole bargaining agent, the granting of dues checkoff, and a written contract.

At this point it is important to examine just what forces were active in the strike. Lined up against the strikers were Mayor Henry Loeb and the elements that had elected him. These included the segregationist-minded middle classes, the two daily Memphis papers, Commercial Appeal and Press Scimitar, both owned by the giant Scripps-Howard chain, and the city's big business. This support is not too unusual as Loeb is a businessman himself, owning part interest in over 116 barbecue, chicken, donut, and grocery stores, as well as three of the five chain laundries in Memphis.

Loeb continuously refused to deal with the strikers at all unless they went back to work, labeling them "lawbreakers." He used the city's police force to guard scabs he recruited, putting the cops on a seven day work week, and sent Negro cops, disguised as sanitation workers, into union meetings to report on what happened. One such cop was caught by the strikers in a meeting; he was disarmed, brought to the front of the room and ridiculed, and then run out of the hall.

The two Scripps-Howard papers called the strike "a shallow attempt at blackmail" on its first day, and then moved on to condemning "irresponsibility," "outside agitators," and the inciting of "anarchy." Said one of their lead editorials: "The 12 crews who reported for work today are right. The rest of the 180 crews are wrong."

If the expected forces were lined up behind the city administration, some strange forces were lined up behind the strikers, but for clear enough reasons. One of the big surprises was to find the moderate Negro political machines backing the strikers. These included the NAACP, a very moderate force in Memphis, and the Shelby County Democratic Club (SCDC). Both these groups had supported a Negro moderate for mayor in 1967— who lost.

The Unity League, another moderate Negro group, which had supported the incumbent, Ingram, for re-election in 1967, also backed the strike. The irony of this is that Ingram had previously issued a strikebreaking injunction against the sanitation men in 1966.

The election was won by Loeb, capitalizing on the split in the Negro political machines (Black people in Memphis make up over 40% of the city's population). When he took office, Loeb bluntly stated that as he had not needed the Negro moderates to get into the mayor's office, he would not need them to stay there, and completely cut them off from the city's patronage plums. This infuriated both Negro factions, which had become accustomed to getting at least some of the goodies. When the strike came, these two Negro factions (the NAACP-SCDC and the Unity League) each tried to outdo the other in an effort to repay Loeb for cutting them out of the patronage system. When these leaders moved to support the strikers, they also mobilized their machines, which included more than half of the city's 300 Negro ministers. This support enabled the strikers to get the large amounts of money necessary to sustain their drive. AFSCME, it seems, had not allocated any strike benefits to the men.

Also unusual was the support of the AFL-CIO Labor Council leaders in Memphis. It is quite rare when these guys will support a wildcat strike, but they too had backed a loser for mayor and were therefore cut out of the patronage system by Loeb. They proved to be of little other than financial help though, as their very positions depended on not mobilizing their memberships in support of anything ("Hell, if we organize them to back up this strike, they might stay organized long enough to boot us out of our nice cozy offices!") But the main point here is that two forces usually used by the rulers of any city to act as a safeguard against mass action by poor and workers, namely the Negro moderate machines and the bureaucratic trade union leadership, were lost to the rulers of Memphis in this strike. Of course, this does not mean that Loeb couldn't have won them back by making major concessions to them; he probably could have. But Loeb never even tried. And so the fluke coalition behind the strikers held.

The other unusual force supporting the strike was the AFSCME itself. The international office tried on numerous occasions to make a deal with the city. In particular, they offered to supply union men to pick up garbage at hospitals and the big downtown businesses, as these were deemed "essential services." They also offered early in the strike to settle simply

for a letter of intent from the city, thereby giving up the demand for a written contract. Jerry Wurf, president of the AFSCME, told the Memphis City Council on Feb. 27: "I can't see why the mayor or the council or someone else can't put the conditions of employment in a letter and address it to us as you would address a letter to an automobile dealer or any other dealer for a piece of equipment."

The international officers also made a promise at one point in the strike to donate to some worthy Memphis "charity" their share of the first year's dues if the city would allow a dues checkoff system for the sanitation workers. But Loeb was having none of it. What he wanted was clear: the complete capitulation



T.O. Jones, Sanitationmen's leader.

of the strikers and the unconditional surrender of all the forces backing the strike. But the tremendous solidarity of strikers themselves prevented that kind of a deal from ever being made.

By the middle of March it became clear that a stalemate was developing. The city's early strategy was just to get the men back to work and let the strike die. This obviously wasn't working. The strikers and their various

backers forestalled this possibility early in the strike by visiting the strikers' landlords, the city's utility company, and the various loan companies and retail stores to whom the strikers were in debt, persuading them to declare a moratorium on all debts, and extracting a promise that no evictions, repossessions, etc., would take place during the strike. The companies also agreed that repayment schedules were to be pushed back until after the strike was settled. Of course, it wasn't sympathy for the strikers that prompted this cooperation, but rather the threat of a massive secondary boycott. This front, therefore, was neutralized early in the battle. Immediate expenses, for food and necessary clothing, medicines, etc., were met by raising money from the Black community, which contributed upwards of \$100,000 during the strike.

The next move of the city administration was to recruit local scabs and use the threat of job loss to get the men to return to work. Both newspapers went out of their way to help in this move. On Feb. 18 the morning paper ran a long article written by one of their reporters who had spent the previous day scabbing. He gave the time and place to report for scab duty, described how one of his co-scabs had given up a worse job to get one on the garbage truck, and how they only worked 3 hours but were paid for 7. He also made it clear that the scabs were well protected from the people by police, as every garbage truck was accompanied by a police patrol car. The only heed the strikers took of this scab propaganda was to issue a call to boycott the newspapers, a call that was respected by over 80 percent of the more than 200,000 Black people in Memphis.

The city's businessmen joined in the effort by organizing the Boy Scouts and the Junior Chamber of Commerce to pick up garbage in the wealthy East Memphis area, and designated various suburban shopping centers as central collection points. After getting a taste of what the job was like, these fellows quickly lost interest in playing garbage man. Instead, they set up a bonus fund to attract enough scabs to pick up the garbage for them.

Meanwhile, the city's scab recruitment went very slowly, partly because of a community-wide solidarity with the strikers, and also because scabbing got to be a very dangerous,

as well as low-paying, profession in Memphis. Union men and strike supporters began patrolling the city's streets looking for scabs, photographing them, and getting their names. During this period, scabs were visited by ministers and told to stop scabbing, and then called up by the union and told the same. After that, other things happened. One scab reported a brick thrown through his bedroom window one night; another reported that the gear shift of his car was sawed off; another that his car was firebombed and demolished during the night; another that his house was firebombed. Scabs on the streets reported being shot at in the Black neighborhoods; others were harassed and stoned by Black teenagers. With this going on, the scabs seemed to get the message; few stayed on the job for very long.

The city then got some state legislators from the Memphis area to sponsor a series of bills in the State Legislature that would have made it a felony to advocate or organize a strike of state, county, or municipal employees, and would have outlawed dues-checkoff in Tennessee for those employees. This bill would probably have had little effect, since the strikers were not paying much attention at all to the anti-worker laws conjured up against them, but as it turned out the state AFL-CIO and assorted liberal forces kept these bills bottled up in committee hearings during the strike.

The strikers then made a major move to break the stalemate. On February 22, 10 days after the strike began, over 800 strikers gathered at a city council meeting demanding that the council go over the head of the mayor and meet their terms. The mayor was driven out of the meeting, as were most of the councilmen, and those left formed a temporary committee to decide what to do. While these councilmen were "deciding," the strikers took over the giant council chambers and brought in over 40 pounds of cold cuts and a hundred loaves of bread. The strikers' wives prepared sandwiches for everyone, cutting up the meat on the city attorney's table, while strike leaders and others, including women, took over the council's microphones and sang gospel and labor songs, including "Solidarity Forever." Speeches were made about the need for workers to stick together and for the Black strikers to have pride in themselves. One man pointed to the City Emblem on the wall, which includes a cotton bowl in it, and went through the history

of slavery and of oppression against Black workers in the United States. He announced that if the city didn't come across with the goods there was going to be some "redecorating" done in the council chambers and in the rest of Memphis as well. It was then that the council committee said that it had agreed to meet the strikers' demands. With warnings of caution from some of the men there, the strikers left the chambers and went home.

The next afternoon the city moved to beat down the previous night's offensive by the strikers. The full council met in a second session and, despite the fact that hundreds of strikers showed up to pack the council chambers, voted as a body to overrule the temporary committee's decision of the previous night. They also issued a declaration supporting the mayor and giving him full authority to handle the strike as he saw fit. Workers jeered and booed the council, then left the chambers to hold a mass march through downtown Memphis. The police at first refused to allow the march, but the strikers made it clear they were going ahead anyway. Jerry Wurf pleaded with the police to allow the march to happen peacefully. Said Wurf: "These people are peaceful. Please help us keep it peaceful. We just want to get them to a hall. Let us get them to a hall. They've been treated very badly this afternoon and they are just upset. Just help us keep it peaceful."

The cops did decide to let them march, but as the men got into a downtown street, the police began wishing each other good luck and pulling out their gas masks. Then a patrol car with five cops in it began swerving into the side of the march as it proceeded down the street, pressing the marchers against store windows and walls. When some of the marchers began rocking the cop car, the police charged the strikers from the side, shooting tear gas at them and spraying them with Mace. Those they isolated were clubbed over the head and beaten bloody. When it was all over, several strikers were hospitalized and others had to be carried off by friends. Seven of the marchers were arrested: T. O. Jones on charges of "inciting to riot," another for "assault with intent to commit murder," and others on charges of "assault and battery," as well as "disorderly conduct" and "nightriding."

On Saturday, February 24, the city put what it must have thought would be the finishing touches on the strike. It got a new injunction

against the strikers that outlawed participating in, causing, authorizing, or inducing a strike against the city; made coercing of the city by striking, picketing, or other means to recognize the union illegal; and prohibited any picketing of city property.

But it didn't work. The strikers' response was to organize a massive boycott of the downtown businesses, a boycott that was to lower retail sales in Memphis over 40 percent during the rest of the strike. The marches and mass meetings continued daily. A few days later, though, the international organizers and representatives of the AFSCME were charged with violating the city injunction. When the case got to court in the first week of March, union counsel Anthony J. Sabella said, "As far as I'm concerned these guys (sanitation workers) officially left their employment February 12. Our position is that these men have quit. I'll admit the city had no obligation to put them back to work." But the guys from the AFSCME's international were found guilty anyway, and fined \$50 each along with a 10 day jail sentence. (The case was immediately appealed.)

At this point the ministers and other Negro moderates took over the open leadership of the strike. Marches, mass meetings, and boycotts against downtown businesses and the Scripps-Howard papers continued. As mid-March arrived, the city administration was being badly pressed by the strikers. Before the strike began, it had 180 trucks going out each day, and a work force of 1,600 men working four 10-hour days. Garbage was collected twice a week throughout the city; in the suburban areas the men went around the houses to pick up cans in the backyards. Also picked up was the garbage of the city's industries, although a city ordinance prohibits this. During the strike, garbage collection was handled by no more than 50 to 60 trucks going out each day, because there were at most 200 scabs willing to work. The city went into a program called "selective pickup," which meant once every 5 or 6 days in the rich areas of town, and once every 2 weeks, sometimes not at all, in the poor and working-class sections. In addition, all garbage had to be placed at the curb, even in the wealthy areas. Backyard pickup was cancelled.

And unlike the New York garbage strike, support for the strikers was constantly increasing. At the predominantly white Memphis

State University, a series of rallies in support of the strikers was held, led, and organized by the Black Student Organization (BSO) and white radicals. At least two hundred Black and white students turned out in support of the strike, and many left the campus to march with the strikers.

In the Black community itself, high school students were becoming the spirit of the drive. Black high school students were suspended from school for leading their fellow students out of classrooms to join the strike marches. Fire and Police Commissioner Frank Holloman announced that truancy laws were going to be strictly enforced as a way of cutting down on the number of students who weren't going to school at all so that they could participate in the workers' demonstrations. But the students marched anyway, singing as they went down the street with the strikers:

"Pork chop, pork chop, greasy, greasy,
We can beat Loeb, easy, easy."

"Loeb shall, he shall, he shall be removed,
Just like a can of garbage in the alley,
Loeb shall be removed."
and

"Freedom isn't free, freedom isn't free,
You've got to pay the price,
You've got to sacrifice,
For your liberty."

Behind the sweeping support the strikers were receiving from their people, the city moderates, led by the AFL-CIO, began to launch a recall drive designed to force Loeb to run for reelection two years before his term expired. And the businessmen, principally the insurance companies and the downtown retail stores, began getting cold feet. Though they had been actively involved in fighting the strike ever since it began, it dawned on them that Memphis might be burned down if the strikers were crushed. This frightening thought spurred Memphis Big Business to form a new group, called Save Our City to push for a settlement of the strike acceptable to the sanitation workers.

Pressure was also put on the city council, which quickly passed a resolution urging the mayor and the union to resume negotiations, and naming a mediator to direct negotiating sessions. Though these two moves had little impact on the strikers or their drive, it had a major impact on the city administration, which

began to see itself being isolated in the face of an ever-mounting offensive by the strikers themselves. The stalemate was breaking up, and the strikers were moving closer to victory.

The city now made its final move to break the strike. It began recruiting scabs from out of state, mainly from rural areas of Arkansas and Mississippi, rounding them up at four o'clock each morning, trucking them into the city on county penal farm trucks, then driving them back to their home areas after dark. There were reports that inmates from the county's penal farm were also being used on the garbage routes. One woman, whose husband was an inmate there, reported seeing him working on a garbage truck. Police got in the act as well; they were seen driving the garbage trucks. This was in



Black students rally around strikers' cause.

addition to other cops who were accompanying each garbage truck in a patrol car.

A vigilante group was organized by the county sheriff's department, made up of segregationist-minded elements of the middle classes. For a fee of \$100, men were given a uniform, badge and gun, and were sworn in as "auxiliary

deputy sheriffs." Police cars manned by three cops, one armed with a machine gun, another with a telescopic mounted sniper rifle, and the third with a "riot" shotgun, began patrolling the city's Black neighborhoods in large numbers. Loeb got on t.v. and in the papers daring Black people to "riot," declaring that if they did, it would be met with massive force and squelched instantly.

Loeb then made his "final offer," evidently to try to win back some of the business support he had recently begun to lose. The offer was divided into four parts: (1) all sanitation workers return to work immediately and without any conditions; (2) that in returning to work, the men issue a "no strike" pledge; (3) that then the city and the strikers negotiate a settlement of the issues; (4) that all issues the two parties cannot agree on be submitted to a general city-wide referendum in August, 1968.

The response from the strikers and the Black community was not long in coming. The "final offer" was voted down by the strikers almost to a man. Cruising cop cars were stoned in the Black neighborhoods. Loeb businesses had their windows smashed, and some were firebombed. And many of the giant piles of garbage throughout the Black communities were set on fire.

Calling Dr. King

As was noted before, the main link between the strikers and the Black community had come to be controlled by the moderate Negro leadership of Memphis. Though they had made some veiled threats of "riot," this was not a form of struggle they were ever going to use. The city hall boys knew this, and in trying to provoke a rebellion, called the moderates' bluff.

One of the ministers said that if the moderates dropped the leadership it would be picked up by the militants. Another minister, a white liberal, described the dilemma this way: "A lot of ministers are on the tight rope. We are trying to help the sanitation workers—normally a pretty mild-mannered group—assert their rights. And on the other hand we are trying to hold down the young militants who want to tear the place up."

So the crisis had two sides to it. One was that many of the Black militants were not really concerned with the immediate needs of the strikers. The other was that the moderates were not going to permit their positions of leadership to fall into the hands of anyone

else if they could help it.

With this motivation, the moderates did the only thing they could have to maintain control and at the same time continue the strike battle: they called in Dr. Martin Luther King and the A. Phillip Randolph Institute. From them they got national publicity, more money, and a great deal of help in stemming the tide of the Black militants.

King announced he would lead a giant parade through downtown Memphis on March 22, and the Negro moderates urged all Memphis workers to stay away from work and join the parade. As it turned out, almost the entire work force of Memphis did stay away from work that day, but it was because of a 16-inch deep snow-storm that paralyzed the city, and forced the parade to be postponed until March 28th.

When the parade finally took place on March 28th, it was not what the moderates had hoped for. Windows began shattering minutes after the six thousand marchers set out through downtown Memphis. Young Black demonstrators began pulling the placards off their picket sticks and using the sticks against display windows. As windows were broken, the guys would melt back into the parade, then dart back out again as they passed another big display window. The people were not objecting; it was as if this had been expected ever since the strike began. Young demonstrators continued darting out, melting in, and darting out again. Then Dr. King, from the head of the parade, began screaming that the parade was over, quickly fled from the scene, and sped out of town in his automobile.

The police massed ahead of the march put on their gas masks and started shooting tear gas into the demonstrators. Many retreated back to the Clayborn Temple, origin of the parade, but a few hundred young Black demonstrators went forward and fought the police with stones, sticks, and fists. It was an uneven battle, the young people were clubbed bloody into the gutters, and those that could then retreated with the rest of the people.

As the police moved up on the retreating marchers, they began shooting more tear gas into the thousands of people who had surrounded the already jammed Clayborn Temple. Gas seeped into the church itself, choking the many people packed inside; outside, the clubbing and beating continued. Finally the cops pulled back long enough to allow everyone to leave the area.

In almost no time there were over 3,800 National Guardsmen occupying Memphis, mainly stationed throughout the Black communities. State police were rushed into the city and city cops were put on emergency duty. Lyndon Johnson got into the act as well, offering to send any amount of federal troops the city might need to maintain "law and order." The same afternoon, a Black teenager was trapped by police, who had been after him on looting charges, and ordered to come out with his hands up. Over 15 witnesses reported that he did come out with his hands high over his head and that one of the cops who had trapped him shoved his riot gun into the boy's stomach and shot him. He died minutes later in the street and was left there long enough for the cops to stick a knife near his outstretched hand for a photograph that was later used as "proof" that he had tried to knife the cop, and that the shooting was in self-defense.

That night, Memphis burned. Martial law was declared; a curfew was put into effect from 7 PM to 5 AM, and the guardsmen continued their occupation. Over the next days, the cops ran wild throughout Memphis: men reported that cops had broken into their homes without search warrants and beat them with clubs when they objected. Black people on the street were pushed around by cops; and whenever anyone objected, he was beaten to the ground and then charged with "resisting arrest," "assaulting an officer," "disorderly conduct," and other assorted crimes.

On April 4th, Dr. King returned to lead a second parade. But that evening, just before sunset, he was gunned down by a sniper.

In the wake of the King assassination, giant sections of cities across the United States went up in smoke. LBJ's earlier offer to send federal troops to Memphis was reversed; instead he sent Under Secretary of Labor James Reynolds to Memphis with orders to settle the strike as soon as possible. The city's real rulers quickly announced in no uncertain terms that they had had enough. They commanded the city administration to settle the strike immediately. As the Memphis Commercial Appeal, the main stalwart behind the strike-breaking drive and the most vocal opposition to the strikers' every demand for over eight weeks, said in one of its lead editorials on April 13th: "It is no longer a matter of hold the line at any cost."

On April 16th, the strikers, in a wildly victorious mood, met to vote on a proposed settlement. When T. O. Jones was introduced, the strikers greeted him with a thunderous standing ovation. The cheering seemed as though it would never stop. Jones broke into sobs before the workers he had fought with for nearly eleven years. Men were stamping their feet, others were dancing in the aisles of the meeting hall.

The proposal read to the strikers, titled A Memorandum of Understanding, was to be in effect 14 months. It contained a "no strike" clause, as well as the following points: (1) an end to discrimination against Black workers; (2) no discrimination against any worker because of strike activities; (3) a grievance procedure, but leaving ultimate authority on all grievances in the hands of the mayor or his designated representative; (4) recognition of the union as the "designated representative" for all laborers, drivers, and crew chiefs belonging to it; (5) dues checkoff on a voluntary basis to be channeled through the workers' credit union; (6) a pay increase of 10 cents effective May 1st, and an additional 5 cents on September 1, 1968.

It was not all the men had fought for. Far from it. But it represented a clear victory, one which the men knew they had won, one which they were willing to consolidate before fighting again. The men voted to accept it.

Freedom Is A Constant Struggle

The struggle that grew out of the Memphis strike is not over. The union announced that it was next going to organize the city's hospital and housing authority workers. The community-based backers of the strike have decided to continue the boycott of the two Scripps-Howard papers and of all Loeb-owned businesses. They have also announced that they will continue fighting for demands which grew out of

the union struggle: better housing, better schools, and more jobs for the city's working class and Black people.

The city administration has not given up the fight either. Although the strike settlement will cost the city no more than \$500,000 over the next 14 months, Loeb, on April 17th, urged passage of a series of tax bills that will net an estimated \$12 million. Among them were

a \$3 a month garbage collection fee (estimated to net \$4 million a year), and a half-cent increase in the city's sales tax.

Though the strikers won many basic demands, chief among them a form of recognition for their union, there is still much that they demanded that will have to be fought for in the future. One main reason for this is that though the AFSCME and the moderate Negro leaders were able to fight effectively against the local government, they were not willing or able to take on the federal government in the same manner. This reduced their ability to win what they were after. Now the most immediate need of the strikers is to further develop their own leadership, a leadership that will, together with the men, enforce what has been won, and keep fighting for more.

It is also very important to understand why the strikers won what they did. There were two main reasons: first, their tremendous solidarity throughout the length of the strike; and second, the solid and continual support of their people, who refused to allow the city to break the strike, and backed up the struggle in every way they could. Through this constant struggle, taking place on ever-higher levels, thousands upon thousands of workers, both Black and white, greatly increased their understanding of political forces and power. However, this struggle did not take place without many weaknesses. It should not be forgotten that although the Black militants had great prestige, especially among the young, they were frozen out of an active leading role in the strike. Had they organized effective bases among the people before the strike began, and had they been willing to fight relentlessly for the immediate needs of the people as well as long-range needs, they would probably have been able to play a much greater role in the struggle and been successful in carrying it on at a much higher level. There is a pressing need for these two problems to be overcome.

The union's international leadership exhibited the same basic weaknesses as the moderate community leaders, except that in the case of the union big shots, there were no radicals

to worry about. Had there been, a lot of things could have happened. The AFSCME, for example has about 1,900 locals and a membership of somewhere around 350,000 workers. Yet it never mobilized this membership in support of the Memphis strike.

The same fear of mobilization was present in the AFL-CIO unions in Memphis and throughout Tennessee. The most effective support they could have given to the strike would have been to pull off a general city-wide walkout. But no unions issued such a call. None of them even called for a one-day work stoppage. With a fighting leadership and rank and file, this sort of a move could and should have happened.

From this it should be clear that the role of radicals in unions is to struggle for rank-and-file control based on a fighting program, and for solidarity with all other fighting workers. With this, the rulers of Memphis could have been turned inside out, and in a much shorter time than nine weeks.

The immediate needs, therefore, are for Black militants and white radicals to begin building the necessary ties with the people, principally through work in trade unions and working-class communities. Until they succeed in this task, struggles such as developed in Memphis will continue to be flukes, and our role in them will be marginal at best.

But though the Memphis struggle may well have been a fluke, it has also given us a glimpse of the goals we should be organizing toward. These goals apply to a working-class revolution as well as to immediate working-class struggles. They are: mass rank and file solidarity among workers, complete community support of struggles by workers, a realization of the enemy's many forms of attack (for example, the role of the newspapers and other mass media), a willingness to take on the forces of the state and defeat them, the ability to go beyond strictly trade union forms of struggle when necessary for victory (especially through a beginning link up between the Black Liberation movement and Black workers), and the basic and revolutionary conviction that When We Dare To Fight, We Will Win.

