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At last! The Million Worker March Movement in print

written by Cheryl LaBash
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Mobilizing in OUR OWN NAME

Million Worker March

An Anthology by Clarence Thomas



Clarence Thomas



MWMM in Japan 2016



Leo Robinson



Saladin Muhammad



Brenda Stokely holding Kalola



Sharon Black



Tatiana and Oscar Grant



John Parker



Hezekiah Prawl



Cheryl LaBash in 2015.



Angela Davis on Juneteenth at the Port of Oakland 2021.



San Francisco General Strike in 1934

Gloria Verdieu and Delores Lemon-Thomas at the U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange Conference 2008



The Million Worker March at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Oct. 17, 2004.



Chris Silvera speaking in Union Square, NYC, 2021

Mobilizing in Our Own Name: Million Worker March

An anthology by Clarence Thomas

DeClare Publishing

MillionWorkerMarch.com

Available at most booksellers

Although I began to write a review of this remarkable anthology as a literary and historical assessment, it is much more than that to me. It is personal.

Clarence Thomas — the “real” Clarence Thomas, labor leader and author — tells an amusing story of his conflicted reaction when he heard some Detroiters appropriated the Million Worker March (MWM) T-shirt design and made T-shirts!

That was me. Just weeks away from the Million Worker March on Oct. 17, 2004, the Detroit Labor Day Parade and Labor Fest gathered hundreds of workers — our audience — in one place. But the official T-shirts couldn’t get here in time to deck out the distribution team. In the spirit of MWM, we forged ahead. No T-shirts, no problem — we made a few to wear for the day.

What drew me so intensely to the MWM? Only when I was present at the Lincoln Memorial on that day did I understand. It was the only time since my first national march in Washington, D.C. — against the Vietnam War in 1967 — that the hardhat, overalls and work boots I wore meant something more than a way to earn a paycheck, to pay the bills so I could do political organizing.

Being a worker counted; our independent voice, unfiltered through capitalist party politicians, counted in the Million Worker March Movement.

Looking back now, through these pages, pictures and documents, the MWM was our movement’s equivalent of a Midwestern spring crocus pushing through the snow of the remnants of the Cold War, McCarthy red-scare and post-9/11 Patriot Act.

A harbinger of upsurge

I think we can say MWM's independent voice was a harbinger of the upsurge reflected in the electoral arena through the wide, unexpected enthusiasm for Bernie Sanders' unapologetically socialist campaign in 2016. When the facade of U.S. democracy overrode the desire for progressive change, the imperialist business-as-usual Democratic Party pro-war corporate candidates were rejected, saddling the world with wannabe fascistic emperor Trump.

The striving for progressive change thwarted in 2016 was renewed in the unprecedented mass movement throughout pandemic summer 2020. Justice was demanded for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many more, but also deeper systemic justice. It burst through in over 2,000 cities and towns in all 50 states with as many as 26 million U.S. participants.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 and MWM organizing and leadership in action against police brutality and murders foreshadowed this development, too.

In 2010, ILWU Local 10 shut down Bay Area ports for justice for Oscar Grant, and on May Day 2015 with the union action to stop police killings of Black and Brown people.

For me, the example of ILWU founder and leader Harry Bridges uniting with the San Francisco Black community to take control of the waterfront jobs echoes October 10, 1868, in Cuba, when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed enslaved Black workers, asking them to join in the fight for Cuban independence. More than a winning strategy, it is fundamental.

This was the key to winning the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, forging the ILWU with Black workers at its militant core, and Local 10 where the Million Worker

March was born.

Centrality of Black workers

The settler-colonial crimes underpinning the United States of America can no longer be denied. The false concept of white supremacy is condemned publicly even from the presidential lectern.

The centrality of Black workers is one of two historical components of the ILWU that made the MWM possible. The other is the rank-and-file character of the ILWU. The ILWU survived the McCarthy era, refused anti-communism and the Taft-Hartley “loyalty” oaths to capitalism.

Today Black workers, Latinx and Indigenous peoples and women lead the pivotal working-class social justice movements of our time. The Bessemer, Ala., organizing drive at Amazon; fast food workers fighting for \$15 and a union; nurses and health-care workers demanding COVID-19 personal protective equipment and safe staffing, challenging the corporate sickness-for-profit health industry.

Workers and social movements are pressing against systemic boundaries as the MWM showed us in 2004.

Million Worker March's influence

Although this book is about one initiative, one time in history, it has influenced or been part of all the major struggles in the nearly 20 years since MWM organizing began: from advances in understanding gender, to migrant and immigrant struggles, to solidarity with Palestine, international solidarity against war from Venezuela to Iraq, to the pandemic.

“Mobilizing in Our Own Name” is the story of the Million Worker March, but it is also very much the reflection of the life of a third-generation longshoreman and his

family that is intertwined with the struggles, social fabric and political history of Oakland, Calif., and the Black freedom movement.

We thank the REAL Clarence Thomas for sharing with new and old generations this remarkable history and labor of love.

