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From Baltimore to New Orleans, workers fight back, hit the streets!

written by Gregory E. Williams
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Jan. 18, Baltimore – activists launching Peoples Fightback Network march in honor of Dr. King, standing with sanitation workers and unions while opposing war and genocide. SLL photo

Following is a talk from the Jan.18 Honor Dr. King Jr. Rally and March, organized by the Peoples Power Assembly in Baltimore, launching the new Peoples Fightback Network. Those gathered stand in solidarity with Baltimore’s sanitation workers, for union rights and worker safety, and against war and genocide. The rally took place at McKeldin Plaza with the march ending at City Hall. Gregory E. Williams is a co-editor of Struggle-La Lucha.

Hi everybody, it's an honor to be with you all here in the struggle. I'm a public health worker visiting from New Orleans. This is my first time in Baltimore, and in talking to comrades here, I'm learning so much about the people's day-to-day struggles, but also the incredible fightback. There are so many similarities between our two cities.

For example, with the ongoing Baltimore sanitation workers' struggle. The conditions sound so similar. Back in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, sanitation workers went on strike in majority-Black New Orleans. They were employed by Metro Services Group, a private company contracted by the city.

The pandemic really exposed the brutal conditions of capitalism everywhere, and it certainly did in New Orleans, where there was never a real recovery for the working class following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The pandemic also showed that it is workers who are essential, not the bosses and shareholders. Like in other places, New Orleans sanitation workers have low wages, and they weren't getting hazard pay for risking their lives during COVID-19, or the PPE they needed. They were getting \$11 an hour, some working up to 100 hours a week. They didn't have a union, but they were fed up.

So, they went on strike and formed the City Waste Union. They carried picket signs saying, "I am a man," just like they did in the Memphis sanitation worker strike in 1968. They didn't get everything they were demanding. Of course, the bosses pulled out all the stops, hiring scabs and all the rest of it. But by the end of 2021, the city approved \$15 an hour for city contract workers.

That's a victory, never mind that those wages still aren't enough, especially with inflation. And just think about the trillions and trillions hoarded by the billionaires – Biden's "oligarchs" that he actually serves. And all the money that the government is

spending on war. Think about all that wealth, and workers are the ones creating all of it. And then \$15 looks like the pocket change it is. But it was still a victory.

Sometimes, we feel like our local struggles are *merely* local, but they're not. It's the whole capitalist system. And since our problems are connected, the fightback has to be connected.

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