



THROWING GARBAGE

In Support of Garbage Collectors, Sanitation Workers,
and People involved with trash *everywhere!*

SANITATION WORKERS have a long history of labor struggles. There are awesome, inspirational histories related to garbage collection from around the world. This zine is just highlighting a few of those tales. Garbage production, collection, and isolation are a central aspect of our 'civilized' society, and are often overlooked, despite their incredible importance. In 2008, Refuse and Recycling collectors had the 7th most dangerous job in America, ranking higher than a police officer.

THE MEMPHIS GARBAGE STRIKE OF 1968

On 1 February 1968, two Memphis garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck. Twelve days later, frustrated by the city's response to the latest event in a long pattern of neglect and abuse of its black employees, 1,300 black men from the Memphis Department of Public Works went on strike. Sanitation workers, led by garbage-collector-turned-union-organizer, T. O. Jones, and supported by the president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Jerry Wurf, demanded recognition of their union, better safety standards, and a decent wage. Conditions for black sanitation workers worsened when Henry Loeb became mayor in January 1968. Loeb refused to take dilapidated trucks out of service or pay overtime when men were forced to work late-night shifts. Sanitation workers earned wages so low that many were on welfare and hundreds relied on food stamps to feed their families.

On February 23rd, the police used mace and tear gas against nonviolent demonstrators marching to City Hall, and Memphis's black community was galvanized. Meeting in a church basement on 24 February, 150 local ministers formed Community on the Move for Equality (COME), under the leadership of King's longtime ally, local minister James Lawson. COME committed to the use nonviolent civil disobedience to fill Memphis's jails and bring attention to the plight of the sanitation workers. By the beginning of March, local high school and college students, nearly a quarter of them white, were participating alongside garbage workers in daily marches; and over one hundred people, including several ministers, had been arrested. King himself arrived on 18 March to address a crowd of about 25,000 – the largest indoor gathering the civil rights movement had ever seen. King encouraged the group to support the sanitation strike by going on a citywide work stoppage.

A protest and work stoppage was organized for the 28th of March. Memphis city officials estimated that 22,000 students skipped school that day to participate in the demonstration. In the chaos that followed, downtown shops were looted, and a 16-year-old was shot and killed by a policeman. Police followed demonstrators back to the Clayborn Temple, entered the church, released tear gas inside the sanctuary, and clubbed people as they lay on the floor to get fresh air.

Mayor Loeb called for martial law and brought in 4,000 National Guard troops. The following day, over 200 striking workers continued their daily march, carrying signs that read, "I Am a Man".

On April 4th, Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. While Lawson recorded a radio announcement urging calm in Memphis, Loeb called in the state police and the National Guard and ordered a 7pm curfew. On 8 April, an estimated 42,000 people led by Coretta Scott King, SCLC, and union leaders silently marched through Memphis in honor of King, demanding that Loeb give in to the union's requests. In front of the City Hall, AFSCME pledged to support the workers until "we have justice". Negotiators finally reached a deal on 16 April, allowing the City Council to recognize the union and guaranteeing a better wage. While the deal brought the strike to an end, the union had to threaten another strike several months later to press the city to follow through with its commitment.

THE YOUNG LORDS AND THE GARBAGE OFFENSIVE

The New York chapter of the Young Lords (Puerto Rican Liberation organization similar in many ways to the Black Panther Party), officially declared its existence on July 26. They began by polling the East Harlem residents as to the most pressing issue on their minds. “I thought they were going to tell us housing,” Mr. Luciano said.

Instead, the residents identified garbage — la basura, left rotting in the streets because of ineffective sanitation services — as the biggest problem.

“It left me stunned,” he said. But so be it. The Young Lords spent time cleaning the streets with their house brooms and bagging garbage in what they called the Garbage Offensive.

Then they went to the neighborhood sanitation depot to borrow higher-quality brooms. The sanitation officer refused, Mr. Luciano recalled, but he decided he would get the equipment anyway.

“All I did was push him to the side and went inside and got the broom myself,” said Mr. Luciano. “It sounds almost cute. It sounds benign. But it was the most revolutionary thing that I could do at that point.” Mr. Luciano said it changed the group’s attitude. He said the Young Lords were “not willing to confront in those days.”

“That is a very Puerto Rican trait,” he added. “It emboldened them.”

But for weeks, sanitation service in East Harlem continued to be poor. Frustrated, the Young Lords took the bags of garbage and built five-foot-tall barricades across Third Avenue, halting traffic. Then the group’s members set the garbage on fire, which brought out police and firefighters (though not sanitation workers). As a result, the garbage service improved, though it was never what it was in wealthier neighborhoods.

GARBAGE LIBERATION FRONT-

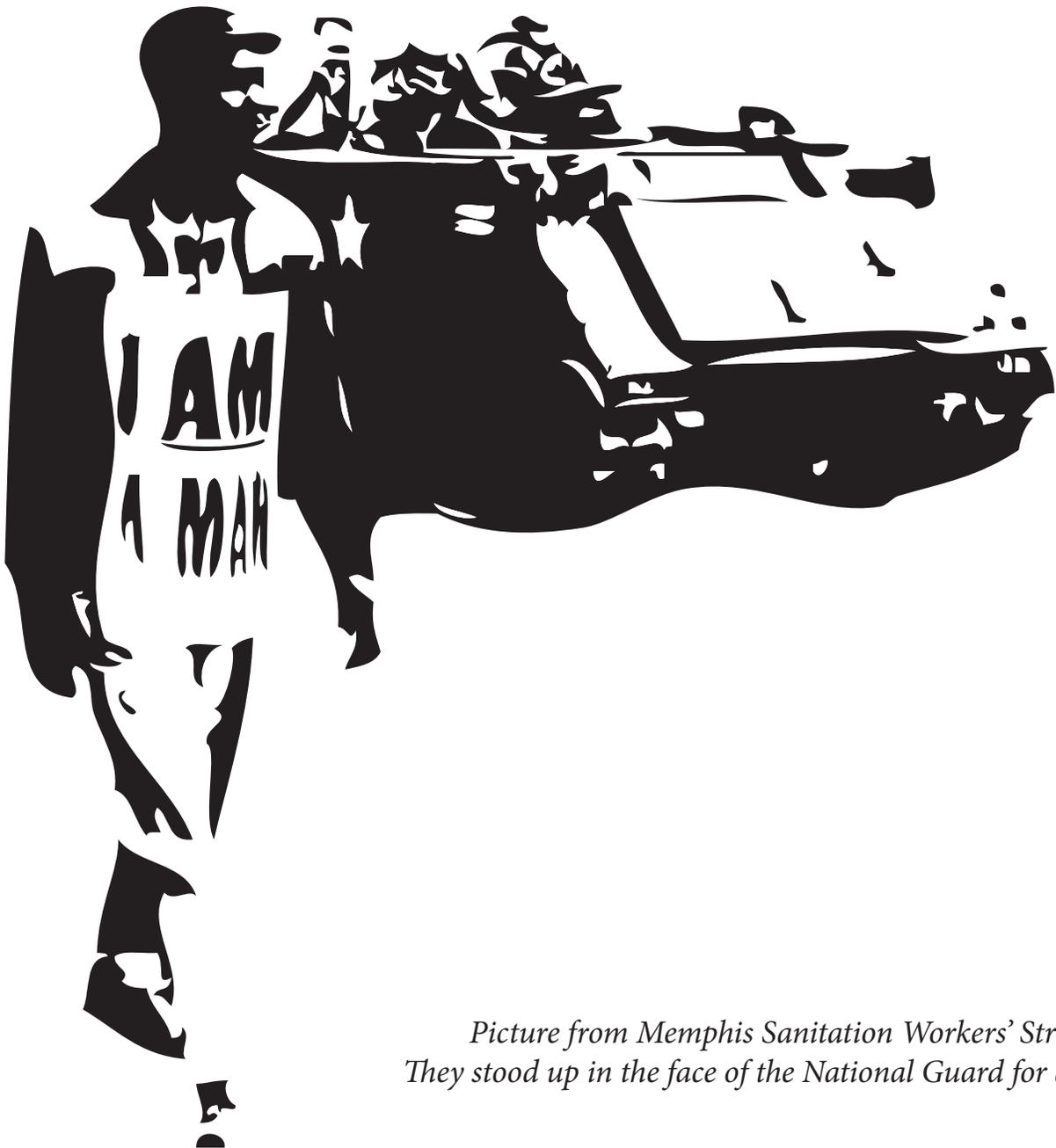
From the 2009 Virginia Terrorist Threat Assessment Report:

“Anarchists sometimes cross paths with or also take part in environmental or animal rights movements. The Green Anarchism movement blends the eco- anarchist lines. The Garbage Liberation Front (GLF) is an ecological direct action group that demonstrates the joining of anarchism and environmental movements. GLF activities include dumpster diving, squatting and train hopping. GLF presence was reported in Chesterfield when several suspicious subjects were discovered trespassing on a train. There is evidence the group may be affiliated or have ties to CrimethInc, as well as environmental extremist groups.”

Note: This “front” does not actually exist, this is here to point out the absurd ways “terrorism” is used. However, city residents and garbage workers alike know of the existence and the use of dumpster diving as a way to reuse perfectly suitable things rejected otherwise, like through Food Not Bombs.

THESE ARE just small glimpses into the long history of people using their roles within trash to fight for their dignity and raise a fuss (while they’re at it) with those who would rather see us covered in filth in order to make more money. Some cities that have had large garbage strikes include New York City (1981); Athens, Greece (2005); Naples, Italy (2008); Toronto (2009); and Greece again (2011).

Thanks for picking up our trash. Communities deserve to be clean.
Especially clean off the scum that make us feel like trash.
- (A)nonymous Garbage Pickers



*Picture from Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike in 1968.
They stood up in the face of the National Guard for a better life.*