

# Southern Workers Assembly

“Building a Movement to Organize Labor in the South”

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## Fight for \$15 stages national strike, civil disobedience across US and South

By Ben Carroll, Raise Up

On November 29, fast food and low wage workers in over 300 cities across the US and the South went on strike demanding at least \$15/hour and the right to form a union at McDonalds and other fast food restaurants. They were joined in these cities by home healthcare, childcare, airport, and other low wage workers and community members who have joined the Fight for 15 and, in many cases, have begun their own organizing initiatives to demand justice, higher wages, and unions in their workplaces.

The day of action also elevate demands to end police killings of Black people and racism, and an end to deportations of immigrant workers. Major actions were held in Richmond, VA; Durham, NC; Atlanta, GA; Birmingham, AL; New Orleans, LA; Charleston, SC, and elsewhere throughout the region.

The actions on November 29 were part of a “National Day of Disruption” initiated by workers in the Fight for 15, and also marked the four year anniversary since the movement began with several hundred fast food workers in NYC who walked off the job calling for \$15 and union rights. From the call to action:

“We are the 64 million hardworking Americans that make far too little to live. We reject the politics of divisiveness that tear America apart by race, religion, ethnicity, and gender. We say unequivocally – any efforts to block wage increases, gut workers’ rights, deport immigrants, or support racism or racist policies will be met with unrelenting opposition. We demand \$15 an hour and union rights. *(continued on page 3)*”



Above: Pictured standing to right is Rev. William Barber II, seated on ground next to him (in center) is Maria Diaz, fast food worker and participant in 2016 SWA Southern Workers School, just prior to arrest.



### ALSO IN THIS EDITION:

- ★ *Raise Up for \$15 takes on the South*
- ★ *Virginia Voters Defeat Right-to-Work*
- ★ *Southern Workers School hosted*
- ★ *City workers organize in NC*
- ★ *TN University workers push back privatization*

# During Election rush, Workers School lifts up Southern organizing



Libby Devlin, Southern Director of NNU/NNOC on panel discussion about organizing lessons and strategy. Also pictured are Nathanette Mayo (UE local 150), Deb Casey (CWA local 2204), Leonard, Riley (ILA local 1422), Gary LaDuke (UE local 170), Roland Mc Millan (Raise Up).

By Dante Strobino

Workers from 12 Southern cities, several workplaces and a number of unions gathered in Raleigh, NC for the Southern Workers School over the Aug. 5-7 weekend to continue their study of the political economy of the Southern region of the U.S. and develop organizing skills. Attendees also participated in a strategy session about “How might the 2016 elections open opportunities for organizing Southern workers?”

The Southern Workers Assembly has been building the Southern Workers School as an important institution to train and develop rank-and-file workers to organize the South. The school has held eight sessions since March, tackling issues such as the role of slavery in shaping the political economy of the U.S. South, lessons from the history of past organizing campaigns such as Operation Dixie and the Civil Rights movement, fighting women’s oppression in the workplace, and building campaigns at work for more protections for LGBTQ people after passage of North Carolina’s House Bill 2, which targets trans people and all working people. The school also offered basic organizing skills such as learning how to map your workplace and tips for one-on-one discussions with co-workers.

“The school is really important for us to continue to draw in Southern workers to educate ourselves and to continue to broaden out this fighting movement at the workplace,” stated Leonard Riley, leader of International Association of Longshoremen Local 1422 and the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment in Charleston.

The latest school session occurred amid a massive year-long media onslaught about the capitalist presidential elections, making workers feel like almost nothing else is going on in the world or at their workplaces. While workers are confronted with a choice between voting for an outright racist billionaire who hates workers like Donald Trump, or giving lukewarm support for Hillary Clinton, the school sought to elevate workers’ roles in building a social justice union movement. After all, it is the class struggle that is the motive force that changes history, not rich politicians.

## The class struggle expands

The movements for Black Lives Matter and Fight for \$15 have rocked this country over the last few years and totally changed the expectations of the masses. They are forcing the politicians to change their political programs in an attempt to hold onto their fading support base. Yet, the Bernie Sanders campaign, which helped expose Wall Street’s profits and greed along with the growing economic inequality in this country garnered huge support from workers, collecting over 12 million votes in the primary. But even Sanders, who has a long history of supporting unions, was pushed by the grassroots movement in the streets, and workers organizing at the workplaces.

“These politicians don’t care about low-wage workers or Black people. They just want our votes,” stated Rolanda McMillan, a McDonald’s worker from Richmond and leader of Raise Up. “That’s why we must organize our people and build power to challenge them and the corporations.”

Delegations participating in the school included ILA dockworkers from Charleston, S.C.; fast food workers and members of Raise Up from several cities, including Richmond, Durham and Biscoe; state and city workers belonging to the United Electrical Workers (UE) from three states, including Local 150 from North Carolina, Local 160 from Virginia and Local 170 from West Virginia; the National Nurses Union/National Nurses Organizing Committee leadership from El Paso, Atlanta and Tampa; members of the Communication Workers from Virginia, some who victoriously struck Verizon and won a better contract and others who are currently voting on an AT&T contract; day laborers from New York City who belong to Jornaleros Unidos; and members of the Pitt County Coalition Against Racism in North Carolina. Several other workers who are not yet organized but are helping to form organizing committees came from plants and workplaces across the South.

Leaving the school, workers identified roughly 50 workplaces in their areas where they will begin leafleting as part of a massive agitation campaign to draw in more workers to the Southern Workers Assembly, build organizing committees and plant seeds for future union organizing campaigns.

## Fight for \$15 in US South *(continued from page 1)*

We say NO to deportations. We demand an END to police killing of black people. We won't back down."

Hundreds of workers and community members across the South also engaged in civil disobedience during the strike to declare that, in spite of the obstacles and challenges that our movements face particularly in light of the outcome of the national election, we will continue to fight and won't back down. Workers in North Carolina were joined in civil disobedience both by Rev Dr William J Barber II, president of the NC NAACP, and Rev Curtis Gatewood, Historic Thousands on Jones Street coordinator, along with other community supporters.



## Uniting Workers at the Point of Production and Service Against the Racist Police Killings

By Saladin Muhammad

Since the September 11 World Trade Center attack, the presidential administrations, campaigns and the current 2016 presidential election, have intensify the levels of government repression against working-class Blacks and people of color, and Muslim's, contributing to widening the divisions within the general US working-class.

The militarization of the police and their killings with impunity, unapologetically gives license to police to be judge, jury, executioner and occupation forces defending corporate property, expansion and profits against acts of protest, worker strikes and rebellions from the most oppressed and exploited sections of society.

While there is an understanding by many that corporate America dictates and shapes America's domestic and foreign policies, corporate America has not been a major target of the fight back against the police killings.

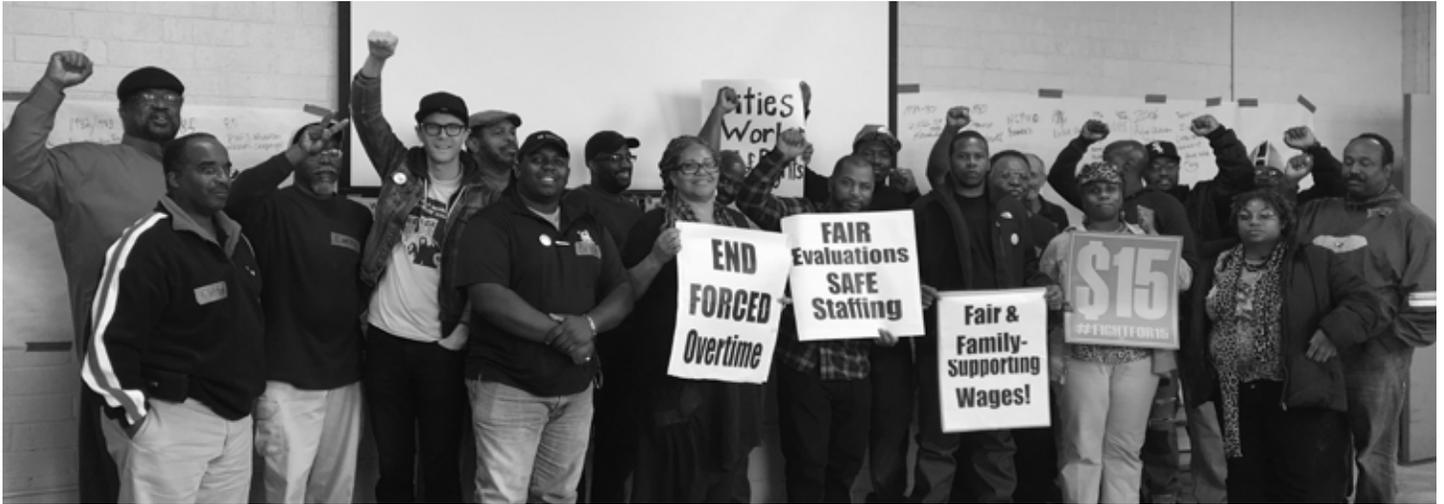
In North Carolina, the NC Public Service Workers Union-UE Local 150, the Southern Workers Assembly (SWA) supported by Black Workers For Justice have begun a campaign to unite the working-class at the points of production and service in calling out their employers to speak out against these police killings and the death squad culture of American policing. It points out that these police killings are targeting a section of the working-class whose labor helps to create the profits for the employers, economy of society and thier communities.

The campaign while at its beginning stage and mainly

at workplaces where UE 150 and SWA have levels of organization and memberships, has 5 main steps - 1. agitation pointing out that the lives of Black and workers of color are threatened by the police killings as they travel to and from work and reside in their communities; 2. conduct a petition campaign at the workplace to collect worker signatures calling on their employers to publicly speak out against these police killings and the failures of the system to affective address this; 3. forming a delegation and take petitions to the employers; 4. holding 15 minute information pickets at the entrance of workplaces calling on the employers to speak out to publicly promote the struggle at the workplace; 5. holding worker and community forums to educate about how these police killings and the racist climate that has been intensified by the economic and political crisis is a major threat to communities, families, and individuals especially of the Black and people of color working-class, and how the climate of division and hatred seeks to prevent working-class unity against these injustices and the other attacks.

The SWA is calling on other local and national unions, worker organizations and worker centers to join in this campaign. The campaign has model resolutions for unions and worker organizations. There are petitions for workers to collect signatures and later deliver to their employers. If you are interested in promoting and supporting the campaign at your workplace contact at [info@southernworkers.org](mailto:info@southernworkers.org).

# N.C. City Workers Launch Statewide Organizing Campaign - Fight for Workers Bill of Rights & Host Statewide Summit



UE local 150, NC Public Service Workers Union has launched an exciting new campaign to organize a statewide movement of city workers. In **Greensboro**, several hundred workers have expressed interest in joining the union and formed a strong Organizing Committee over the last few months. Workers from cities across the state - including Charlotte, Greenville, Raleigh and Durham - gathered in Greensboro for a Statewide Municipal Summit on November 5. Outreach was done to workers in several other smaller cities such as Winston Salem, Rocky Mount, Wilson and Goldsboro.

At the summit, workers were able to share about conditions and struggles in their various cities and learn from each other's campaigns. In every city we organize, we are able to make advances in different areas, for instance:

- **Charlotte** - historic new pay scale that recognizes years of service.
- **Greensboro** - workers won 6 weeks paid leave for mothers, fathers and same sex couples for new children in their family
- **Raleigh** - city workers are covered by Civil Service Protections so have more rights to their and jobs makes harder to be fired.
- **Durham** - won wage increases by uniting with community struggles against too much funding for police, including \$81 million for new HQ.

Building the statewide movement of city workers helps us to share these lessons and bring victories/standards from one city to ALL cities! UE150 see the fights as page 4

both with City Hall, but also the State Government!

This past September marked the 10 year anniversary of the Raleigh Sanitation workers strike that rocked the state, resulting in not only the Mayor Charles Meeker riding on the back of a solid waste truck, but also recognition of the union payroll deduction, meet-n-confer system with Mayor, hiring all temporary workers as permanent and a back-pay settlement for stolen wages. Many of the lessons of this strike continue to be used in our current organizing campaigns, including how to build mass community support to advance the fight for collective bargaining for all public workers and building workers power.

Meanwhile, the **Charlotte** chapter continues to grow as workers in the light rail "LYNX" department have joined the union in large numbers, showing the expanding base of power for our union in the city.

In Greensboro, city workers have been meeting with Mayor Pro-Tempore Yvonne Johnson about several of their main concerns, including lunch breaks for solid waste workers while working their 10-hour shifts, and enforcing a city council resolution passed last year to bring workers up to at least \$10 per hour (went into effect Sept. 2015 but no action yet) and to \$15 per hour by 2020. But unless workers have a union to enforce changes, any city policy or resolution is worthless as toilet paper.

Workers across the state, even without collective bargaining are continuing to organize for basic standards - a Municipal Workers Bill of Rights.

# Tennessee is Not for Sale! #TNisNotForSale

## University Workers Fight Privatization!

By Tom Smith, CWA

In August 2015, United Campus Workers (a Communication Workers of America local union) learned of a secret plan being pushed by Tennessee's Governor Bill Haslam to privatize the building management, maintenance, and security at every single piece of Tennessee state-owned property - every campus, office building, park, hospital, prison, even the national guard armories - costing the jobs of 1 in 5 state workers! This a threat for all ther states if it were to be implemented in Tennessee.

Workers responded by building a broad campaign to stop the privatization in its tracks under the slogan "Tennessee in NOT for sale."

As increased media coverage uncovered the full extent of the Governor's plans - he had directed his staff to secretly begin the push as far back as October 2014 - issues of public accountability and government secrecy became key concerns. It was clear that Haslam's staff had hoped to accomplish the outsourcing largely behind closed-doors, with as little public knowledge and even less public oversight.

Joined by new allies like the League of Women Voters and the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, campus workers continued organizing. Additional street pickets and speak outs were held; media interviews were given; and at grocery stores, in church meetings, and door-to-door in neighborhoods workers collected petition signatures against the plan.

In November 2015, hundreds of workers convened at the governor's office to deliver the first batch of petition signatures, numbering close to 5,000. One by one, state workers, students, clergy, and everyday Tennesseans from all different backgrounds walked into the governor's office and delivered oversized envelopes each containing several hundred petitions and handed them to the governor's staff. The workers' chants echoed through the capitol building and lead nightly news across the state.

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### Organizing Continues

What Haslam and his cronies had hoped to be a fast-paced project in secret has been anything but that. Because of the workers' determination the governor's



(Below) Union members unfurled a petition dozens of feet long in the halls of the state Capitol. Photo: Thomas Walker



staff had to go back to the drawing board, largely scrapping their initial plan. Mobilizations continued throughout the 2016 Legislative Session, with workers marching on state legislators, having call-in days, more street pickets, prayer breakfasts, mass meetings, movie screenings, etc. Actions escalated to shutting down the halls of Legislative Plaza while workers unfurled 50-foot-long banners with name of more than 10,000 Tennesseans opposing the plan.

The initial plan wanted a contractor in place, performing the work, as of August 2016. That date has come and gone, and the work is still in-house, being preformed daily by the state worker professionals. The fight has caused Governor Haslam and his team to change their tactics - from secrecy to siege-warfare. They now intend to drag out the process in the hopes that the cumulative stress of possible layoffs over a two-year period can break the workers' collective resolve.

But the workers and their union, UCW-CWA remain in motion. In the past few weeks alone workers have held another round of events, including a partner meeting with other unions, community groups, and clergy, and a public vigil. UCW-CWA is building for another major mobilization at the state capitol in late January 2017.

# Virginia Workers Push Back Right-To-Work (for less) at Voting Booth

By SouthernWorkers Assembly

On November 8, a ballot initiative that would have put the state's right-to-work (for less) status in the state constitution was defeated in Virginia thus securing an important victory for poor and working people everywhere.

If approved, the measure known as Constitutional Amendment Number 1, would have amended the state constitution so that Virginia could never not be a right-to-work state, except for another change to the constitution. A governor can't veto a referendum.

The Virginia AFL-CIO and its affiliates along with community supporters which include members of the Southern Workers Assembly, worked across the state for months to defeat Amendment 1 despite millions of dollars poured into the state by anti-union, racist Wall Street forces such as the Koch brothers American Legislative Exchange Council.

"Together, we can rewrite the rules and create an economy that works for everyone. Strong unions can be a cultural force that set standards on the job and encourage public officials to set policies that benefit all

workers. As part of a broader movement, unions help create norms for fair treatment, safety, decent wages, and benefits," wrote Doris Crouse-Mays, President of the Virginia AFL-CIO, in an op-ed days before the November 8 vote.

Added Crouse-Mays: "This [right-to-work] law has been on the books for nearly 70 years and takes aim at workers' rights to stand together and speak out in the workplace. I've personally worked in both union and nonunion facilities and I have seen the difference a collective bargaining agreement can make in the lives of working people — not always in wages, but in dignity and respect for one another... Any attempt to weaken dignity and respect does nothing to improve our communities. Our elected officials should be focused on improving our local economies by investing in infrastructure, fully funding our schools, raising wages, and creating good jobs right here in Virginia. Improving the lives of working families should be our first priority."

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## What is the Southern Workers Assembly?

The Southern Workers Assembly (SWA) is a network of local unions, worker organizations, and organizing committees, committed to building rank-and-file democratic social movement unionism (unionism with a social justice agenda, defined by and accountable to the rank-and-file) as a foundation for organizing, uniting and transforming labor power throughout the South.

**SWA Core Principles:** Rank-and-file democracy; national and international labor solidarity; organizing the unorganized; fighting all forms of discrimination; building a Southern labor congress; and building labor's power for independent political action.

**SWA Core Demands:** Repeal Taft-Hartley and Right-to-Work laws, and collective bargaining rights for all workers.

**Join the Southern Workers Assembly today!**

Your membership allows you to participate in Southern Workers Assembly activities on behalf of workers.

Initiation Fee (one time): \$50      Individual Membership: \$50 annually

Organizational Membership: \$1 per member annually (\$100 minimum and \$500 maximum)

Contact us at 252-314-2363 or [info@southernworker.org](mailto:info@southernworker.org) for the affiliation materials.

**[www.southernworker.org](http://www.southernworker.org)**