

BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE

FACT



SHEET

"Organize the South!"

- Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ) is an organization of Black workers from various workplaces, industries and communities in several counties in Eastern North Carolina, two counties toward the Western part of the state, and in Keysville, Georgia. BWFJ was formed in defense of three Black workers who had been fired for challenging harassment and discrimination at a K-mart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina in October 1981.
- With only 6% of the non-agricultural workforce unionized, BWFJ membership is made up of a majority of non-unionized workers. But BWFJ is openly pro-union and has a core of active union members on the steering committee. To focus our efforts to work with and strengthen existing trade unions, to win union support for our programs and particularly to address the problems of organizing unions in the South, the BWFJ formed a trade union commission in 1985. BWFJ has been involved in several union organizing drives, has participated — directly and as members of local unions — in three Central Labor Councils covering five counties, and has been active in other NC State AFL-CIO sponsored activities, such as "Workers Memorial Day" and various political and labor solidarity efforts.
- BWFJ publishes a monthly newspaper, *Justice Speaks*, which covers workplace organizing and struggles, union campaigns, struggles for Black political power and international issues. BWFJ has a weekly one hour radio program called "Justice Speaks." Both the newspaper and radio are important BWFJ institutions challenging the anti-union and racist ideas and campaigns ever present in the South. *Justice Speaks* newspaper gives its readers outside of the South an understanding of the role played by the South and Southern workers in the larger U.S. economy to weaken the power of the trade union movement and the standard of living of workers in the North.
- BWFJ believes that unions must seek to unite all workers regardless of race, nationality, sex, age, handicap or religion into a single organization according to industry. It believes that organizing unions based on craft, weakens and serves to divide labor's potential strength and also reinforces the racial divisions in society.
- BWFJ believes in the equality, rights, and leadership of women workers. In North Carolina, for instance, slightly more than half of all Black workers age 16 and over are women workers. To particularly address the problems of women workers and to help challenge the ever present conditions of sexism and male chauvenism within the workplace and within society at large, the BWFJ formed a women's commission in 1985. Women also comprise half of the BWFJ steering committee. The commission has been actively involved in raising the organization and consciousness of women through publications, "Women Workers Speak Outs," forums and programs on International Working Women's Day, and through direct support for organizing campaigns among women workers.

- BWFJ believes in international solidarity. It supports the independent Black trade union movement in South Africa, the struggle against apartheid and for the liberation of the Southern African people; and supports all progressive struggles against exploitation worldwide.
- BWFJ believes that the movement for Black political power in the South is a necessary ally of labor for carrying out a concerted and politically sound effort to build a labor movement and trade union base in the South. This base in turn will help leverage the position of Black political power in the interest of workers' rights, community development and social progress.
- BWFJ established the Abner Berry Freedom Library and Worker's Center in Rocky Mount, NC in 1987. It sponsors educational forums, a workers' legal clinic, a workers' hotline and a workers' health and safety committee.
- BWFJ sponsors an annual Martin Luther King Supports Labor Banquet — 1990 will be the 7th year. BWFJ Self-Determination Awards are given out at the banquet to people selected for their outstanding work for Black liberation and workers' rights.
- BWFJ helped form the Black Workers Unity Movement (BWUM). BWUM believes that the various Black trade unionists and labor organizations and caucuses, should work for the formation of a national Black workers' congress as the framework unifying the Black workers' movement and developing an independent political platform for Black workers. BWUM held two Black Workers' Political Platform Conferences, in 1987 and 1988 in Enfield, NC.
- BWFJ sponsored three workers' schools involving members and workers from area plants, and one for shop stewards and workplace committee leaders. The July 1989 School involved labor activists from the North and Southern workers.
- BWFJ helped to organize three community screening clinics. The clinics provide monthly examinations to workers and residents in rural communities. Two screenings were held for poultry workers at a Purdue plant.
- BWFJ is organizing the Workers Fairness Campaign. The Campaign is a basic strategy for building a labor movement in the South. Its focus is on building workplace committees to fight around immediate issues, while training and preparing their committees with community support mechanisms to organize unions. It seeks to build coalitions with local unions and various levels of cooperation with the North Carolina AFL-CIO around organizing the unorganized.

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