



**Building a Movement for Democracy: African Americans
the Million Worker March and Beyond!**

Black Workers League Pamphlet

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The struggle for democracy is of paramount importance to working class, African Americans, communities of color and their social movements and organizations, as the current political direction and organization of US society from government to the economy, is waging an all out attack on democracy.

In the name of fighting a war on terrorism, the US is targeting and invading global regions like the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, declaring them bases of international "terrorism." At home, oppressed nationality and working class sectors like African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, women, unemployed, immigrants, gays, Muslims and organizations like trade unions are also defined as potential threats to US national security. Race and religious bigotry is a major part of the Bush and US strategy.

The economic and social crises facing working people in the US are intertwined with the Imperialist wars waged by the US against Afghanistan, Iraq and its support of Israel's racist and brutal occupation and war on the Palestinian People.

Funds for social programs, state budgets, community development, environmental protection and education of the children of workers are being used to finance unjust wars and occupations that are killing and destroying the lives and futures of millions of people at home and abroad.

"The \$87 billion that Bush seeks to 'rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan' is more than the \$78 billion that all 50 states would need to balance their budgets next year."¹

Why a Million Worker March?

The call for the Million Worker March on October 17, 2004, is a call for working and oppressed peoples in the US to build a mass movement for fundamental change of society. It is a call for the many national and local struggles and organizations in the US to come together and mobilize their collective power around a program for worker's democracy and self-determination in solidarity with the democratic struggles of workers and oppressed people throughout the world.

This call comes at a time when the fragmentation of the US left and progressive social movements, including the lack of political independence of the trade unions, pose a grave danger for the defense important mass democratic rights that were won through hard fought struggles during the past two centuries.

The renewal of the left and the linkages between the social movements depend heavily on the political consciousness and degree of solidarity of the working class and oppressed nationalities, and their willingness to challenge the injustices of the US government and corporate class around domestic and foreign policy issues.

Progressives and radicals have an important role to play in helping to build for the MWM, as it helps to expose the imperialist programs of both major political parties and further raises the importance of, and need for independent working class political action to advance and represent a program for working people.

Political Disenfranchisement: Where is the Democracy?

The political disenfranchisement of African Americans in Florida and throughout the country led to the stolen 2000 presidential election of Bush by the forces of the state—the police, the Republican Party control of the election process and the US Supreme Court.

The refusal by the Democratic Party to put forward at least one of its 47 Senators to co-sponsor the Congressional Black Caucus' challenge to the certification of the 2000 election on the grounds of the political disenfranchisement of African Americans, also shows how the two political wings of corporate rule carry out their marching orders when it comes to the dealing with the question of African American democracy.

¹ *LA Times*,

This is a betrayal of the of the Civil Rights Movement, its martyrs and the historical demand for voting rights that has been present throughout African American people's struggle for democracy and self-determination, including the fight to end chattel slavery.

It clearly points out, how all of democracy is threatened when African Americans and all of the oppressed lack real power and a voice to enforce their democracy.

We must remind people that the anti democratic Patriot Acts and Homeland Security were put in place by a regime who came to power because it politically disenfranchised African Americans in Florida and other parts of the country.

This is an important opportunity to make the link between the US racist system of national oppression and workers exploitation; and to educate the working class about the importance and fundamental role of African American self-determination in the struggle for workers democracy and radical change.

This is one of those periods when the majority of the people are looking for explanations, seeking answers, wondering about the direction of events and about their future. There is a growing feeling by many that the system doesn't work and that the problems are deeper than who is elected president.

The 2000 stolen election contributes to the increasing alienation of millions of African Americans and working people from the US electoral system, especially its domination by the corporate controlled Democratic and Republican parties.

This alienation needs a radical working class and anti imperialist mass political organization and program to help give it direction. It does not need to be encouraged to realign with the Democratic Party.

The US War on Terrorism: A Cover for Rising Fascist

As workers and oppressed people in other countries and throughout the challenge the US imperialist global strategy by engaging in organized resistance to take democratic control over their institutions, labor, resources, national wealth and governments, they are being label as terrorists.

In the name of fighting a "war on terrorism" to make the US and world "safe" and "democratic", the US government led by the Bush administration, has unleashed a campaign of repression—a war on democracy—attacking democracy abroad and at home.

Preemptive military strikes, wars, occupations, forced regime change, embargos, torture of war prisoners, refusal to abide by international laws, and increased US police and state repression, have become the actions of a 21st Century US domestic and global doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

The so-called instruments of democracy like the press, educational systems, courts, and constitutional provisions are being weakened, gutted, directly controlled by big corporations and forced in some way to eliminate civil liberties and justify the practice of more repressive government.

For example, a major reason used in a recent labor board decision to deny the right of workers to have a co-worker in meetings with management where possible disciplinary actions may occur know as the Weingarten Act, was that it might impede investigations of possible "acts of terrorism." Patriot Acts I and II and the Department of Homeland Security now determine the level of democracy according to the new anti-terror color codes.

The Bush administration's "shadow government" following September 11; and the announcement by the head of Homeland Security about conditions that might cause the postponing of the 2004 presidential election, are testing the mass tolerance for more repressive government.

By fostering a climate of fear; one that makes illegal and silences the people's voices and dissent, the right-wing forces using Gallup polls and media hype try to promote a minority and racist political sentiment as being the majority sentiment.

However, at the local levels, the real democratic views of the masses are being expressed. “[Since the Patriot Act was adopted,] more than 250 town councils, village boards and city governments across the country have passed resolutions of protest.”²

Globalization is Imperialism

With the restructuring of the global economy and the search for cheaper sources of labor and control of oil and other raw materials internationally to give a handful of nations’ dominance in the high tech economy, has come an imperialist foreign policy and strategy of US empire building. US military bases in 120 countries around the world and client political regimes like Israel form the core of this strategy.

The US has forced “free trade agreements” like the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), representing the expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to every country in Central America, South America and the Caribbean, except Cuba. Bush’s announcement of a US controlled ‘free trade zone’ – from North Africa to Saudi Arabia, including Israel, helps shed light on the US imperialist strategy in that region and the role of the US Military Industrial Complex through its wars and occupations, in carrying out the US imperialist strategy.

With "free trade" comes privatization; the process of converting publicly owned resources--ranging from a nation's oil to its schools, hospitals, water and sewer and sanitation pick-up--into private property and corporate ventures. This reduces access for workers and the poor to vital public services.

The international economic and political crises further intensified by US led wars and occupations, has had a costly impact on workers and their communities inside the US. “The number of Americans living in poverty jumped to 35.9 million last year, up by 1.3 million, while the number of those without health care insurance rose to 45 million from 43.6 million in 2002.”³

Also according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the number of adults considered not in the labor force - those who don't have jobs and are not looking for them - since June 2000, has grown by about 4.4 million, to 66.6 million.”⁴ The numbers of homeless people are rapidly increasing.

The massive increase in immigration into the US and other countries, which become another source of cheaper labor for the corporations, has intensified the competition and tensions among low wage workers.

Immigrants into the US, mainly working class and undocumented from Mexico and throughout Latin America, are made scapegoats along with African Americans by the corporate owned media and government for the crises facing US workers. This has created multiple divisions within the working class.

The criminalization of Black and Latino youth by the main stream media and the courts are part of the scapegoating of these two large nationally oppressed and predominantly working class sectors, who are becoming increasingly radicalized by their conditions. The Racists attacks on Black and Latino rights, thus aim at aligning white workers with corporate and government promoted anti democratic domestic and foreign policies.

The forming of working class based African American-Latino Alliances is important for waging a united struggle against racism and repression by low wage workers and communities, documented and undocumented, service, industrial, agricultural and the unemployed who are forced to compete with each other for jobs and services.

² *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 6/9/04

³ *CNN*, 6/26/04

⁴ *Center for American Progress*, 7/20/04

Kerry: Not a Real Alternative to Bush

Trade unions, liberal groups and some radicals representing the Anybody But Bush (ABB) camp, are pouring millions and major energies into organizing and supporting the Kerry campaign and very little in comparison for building and supporting the rank-and-file trade union organizing and struggles and mass social movements, thereby encouraging working people to put all of our eggs in the electoral basket to try and elect Kerry to replace Bush.

Many of the ABB forces are silent about criticizing or making any demands on Kerry despite the fact that he has not advanced a program much different from Bush. In fact, Kerry is trying to distance himself from his anti-war past and show that he is a more qualified military leader than Bush. Kerry, like Bush, sees promoting the so-called war on terrorism and the repressive policies and budget priorities that go along with it, as central to his program.

Despite Kerry's similar stand on the issues as Bush, some radicals are calling on progressives and independents to be the workhorses for Kerry and the Democrats within working class communities of color as part of the united front to defeat Bush.

And while these radical forces make strong and important criticisms of Kerry, they label him as a "liberal imperialist" and claim that his election would allow progressives more time to organize the fight against the consolidation of reaction.

In 2004, without a people's mandate for democracy, working and poor people—especially African Americans, People of color, immigrants and women, will be voiceless and powerless to influence the direction of the debates and issues in this election.

And despite the tactical arguments on the left, about "independence and initiative" in the united front and following the election, many of the people encouraged to vote for Kerry, should he win, will want to "give him a chance" before attacking him. They will be more focused for a time on the cabinet and Supreme Court appointments. The Democratic Party's political infrastructure and influence among the masses will be strengthened.

Defeating Bush

There is no question that the Bush administration is one of the most reactionary US regimes in many years. It has acted as a steamroller over people's democratic rights, setting the tone for both political parties to support the implementation of more repressive and divisive domestic and international policies.

Yes, the left and progressive forces should be calling for the defeat of Bush. However, the call should be to impeach Bush and Cheney, not elect Kerry. This helps to distinguish the anti imperialist line of the left in the broad anti Bush united front. This call helps to strengthen the anti Bush climate.

A call to impeach Bush helps to make clear that people will not support the continuation of the "Bush" policies, war grimes and lies, no matter who is elected. Also, that people will not wait another 4 years to vote out Bush or Kerry if these policies are continued. It can help to strengthen a working people's democratic movement, by establishing a political bar to hold in check those who seek to eliminate democratic rights and consolidate fascist rule. Following the elections, should Kerry win, the demand to impeach Bush should be promoted as a demand to dismantle the programs and policies implemented under the Bush administration.

Breaking with Business Unionism

The AFL-CIO, the labor federation of 16 million union members sends a wrong message about the role and power of labor, when it publicly opposes the call for a Million Worker March, a national mobilization and call to action for a working people's agenda for democracy.

The fear by the national trade union bureaucracy of waging a strong and united challenge against the forces and policies of capital has led many trade unions to enter into compromises that are eroding some of the hard

fought gains won by their members over the years. This only makes the corporations more arrogant and aggressive in their attacks of unions and the broader working class.

However, the growing endorsements of the MWM by local unions and working class organizations throughout the country despite the refusal of support by the AFL-CIO, is an important statement about the increasing dissatisfaction by the working class rank-and-file with the betrayals of both political parties and candidates in addressing the real needs of working people. It speaks to their desire for a mass movement and program of independent political action, and also the need for rank-and-file democracy within their national unions and the important role of Black worker leadership in advancing the movement for independent working class political action and rank-and-file trade union democracy.

This rank-and-file movement, if further cultivated and organized beyond the MWM, has the potential of further democratizing, politicizing and radicalizing the trade union movement in the direction of building an independent political party. This would build on the initial foundations, but with a greater rank-and-file democratic and mass action orientation and character laid by the Labor Party.

Such a development can help to free the US labor movement from the domination of business unionism, and enable it to become a stronger force in challenging corporate power and globalization.

This MWM mobilization is a very important beginning in the development of a politically independent, anti racist and anti imperialist rank-and-file workers movement. Its success should not be measured by whether it meets a goal of mobilizing a million workers to the March. The process of organizing the MWM has been an important step toward breaking labor's bureaucratic stranglehold over the rank-and-file, and the emergence of a rank-and-file based and activists Black worker leadership in the trade union, workers and African American liberation movements.

Unfortunately, the arguments about numbers and capacity to deliver are often raised by progressives when the call for working class action is initiated by African Americans. It is important for all who say they oppose racism and who want to see a greater involvement by the working class African American and people of color communities in the leadership of the trade unions, social justice movements and national mobilizations opposing the war, to unite with and contribute resources to help mobilize for the MWM.

Developing a Working People's Democratic Agenda

The US troops and the people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine must hear the voices and see the actions of US workers and oppressed people supporting their demands for self-determination. Countries like Cuba, who have refused to bow to US intimidation and lies, must be constantly reassured that US and working people throughout the world will help defend their sovereignty and continue to praise their internationalism.

Workers in the US have an obligation to let the world know, that so-called US "democracy" has serious anti democratic, exploitive, racist and sexist contradictions built within it. And that political democracy for African Americans is constantly under attack.

The US anti-war movement has been an invaluable and internationalizing political force and pillar in the struggle for democracy. It has been the strongest movement against the Bush administration and government policies of wars and occupations, while not explicitly promoting Kerry as an alternative. However, it must be strengthened and deepened within the working class as part of a mass movement and mandate for democracy based on promoting a working people's agenda for democracy. The MWM an ongoing movement can be an important factor in deepening the working class and African American base of this movement.

African American Self-Determination: Building Workers Power

The African American demand for reparations must be raised both as a national democratic demand for self-determination favoring the empowerment of the Black working class, and as an anti-racist and anti imperialist demand challenging the racist oppression and concentration of global wealth and power by the predominantly white international ruling class.

It is vitally important that organizations considering themselves as part of the African American liberation movement unite with the MWM. This will help to ensure that the ongoing development of the struggle for a working people's democracy has deep roots in the struggle for African American self-determination, thereby helping people to understand the strategic and important interrelationship between the African American liberation and workers movement in bringing about a radical transformation of US society.

A break by the African American masses with the Democratic Party to form an independent working class based political party, would represent a major advance in the direction of self-determination and workers power. The formation of a National Black Workers Congress would help to solidify the struggle against African American national oppression within the workers movement, while maintaining the independence and initiative of the Black worker led African American liberation movement.

The MWM can be a launching point for a movement for democracy that builds alignments and institutions for mobilizing independent people's power beyond the elections. Workers, People of color, tenants, the disabled, seniors, women, youth, students, immigrants, gays and their organizations and allies in the middle class, can all unite in the MWM and movement for democracy.

Lessons from the Black Freedom Movement

Like the March on Washington in 1963 demanding a mandate for democracy and leading to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Dr. Martin L. King and the civil rights movement made clear that voting is not enough. Even after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Dr. King called several demonstrations recognizing that democracy must have a mandate of the people.

In 1968, when Nixon announced his candidacy for president, King's emphasis was on building a mass Poor People's Campaign and mobilizing a Poor People's March on Washington around a democratic mandate for working and poor people and opposition to the Vietnam War. He also led a campaign in Memphis, Tenn., in support of unionization and collective bargaining rights for public Sanitation workers.

Like Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, a mandate for democracy must speak to the specific character of the anti-democratic conditions faced by African Americans and workers in the US South: The anti labor laws, low unionization and the lack of collective bargaining rights for the majority of public sector workers in all 12 Southern states, the vast areas of underdevelopment and 3rd World type conditions in terms of lacking adequate water and sewer systems, decent affordable housing, paved roads and adequate healthcare.

The faith based leaders and congregations who today are being asked to support the government sponsored Faith Based Initiatives, which seek to bribe and silence the voices of dissent against government policies, must follow the example set by Dr. King as expressed in his 1963 "Letter from the Birmingham Jail", where he said to fellow clergy: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed...and that 'justice to long delayed is justice denied.'"

The policies of repression are not only meant to eliminate democratic dissent and a people's democratic mandate for the present and future; they are also meant to vilify the dissent, movements, tactics and leaders of the past. They attempt to silence the people's traditions of the struggle for democracy as fundamental to challenging wars, repression, racism, sexism and discrimination of all types. *We must not allow this to happen!*

**Stop the War on Democracy at Home and Abroad!
Support the Million Worker March!**

For More Information write BWL c/o P.O. Box 2951 Rocky Mount, NC 27892