

112TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. RES. 198

Recognizing the coordinated struggle of workers during the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike to voice their grievances and reach a collective agreement for rights in the workplace.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 1, 2011

Ms. EDWARDS (for herself, Mr. COHEN, Ms. WILSON of Florida, Mr. JACKSON of Illinois, Mr. RANGEL, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. PAYNE, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Ms. FUDGE, Mr. RICHMOND, Mr. RUSH, Mr. ELLISON, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mr. GUTIERREZ, Ms. RICHARDSON, Mr. MEEKS, Ms. NORTON, Mr. FATTAH, Ms. MOORE, Mr. WATT, Mr. MORAN, Mrs. MALONEY, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. CUMMINGS, Mr. HASTINGS of Florida, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Ms. BROWN of Florida, Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD, Mr. TONKO, Mr. CARSON of Indiana, Mr. FILNER, Mr. SERRANO, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. PASCRELL, Mr. GARAMENDI, Mr. PALLONE, Mr. KILDEE, Mr. MICHAUD, Ms. SUTTON, Ms. PINGREE of Maine, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BRALEY of Iowa, Mr. HONDA, Mr. ANDREWS, Mr. YARMUTH, Mr. LEWIS of Georgia, Mr. CLYBURN, Mr. HOLT, Mr. DINGELL, and Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

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## RESOLUTION

Recognizing the coordinated struggle of workers during the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike to voice their grievances and reach a collective agreement for rights in the workplace.

Whereas in 1968, 1,300 African-American sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, fought for collective bargaining rights and equality in the workplace;

Whereas in the struggle for workers' rights, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) integrated the labor movement and the civil rights movement in a demand for basic human rights and respect for all men and women;

Whereas Black employees had almost no health care, pensions, or vacation, worked in deplorable conditions, and were disrespected by White supervisors;

Whereas 40 percent of the workers qualified for welfare in order to supplement their low salaries, and were denied the opportunity to improve their working conditions by Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb and the city council;

Whereas, on January 31, 1968, 22 sewer workers who reported for work were sent home when it began raining, losing a day's pay, while White workers were not sent home and received a full day's pay;

Whereas the following day, February 1, 1968, sanitation workers Echol Cole and Robert Walker were fatally crushed by a malfunctioning city garbage truck;

Whereas, on February 12, 1968, Memphis sanitation and public employees went on strike after attempting last-minute negotiations with Mayor Loeb and the city on the terms of their employment, demanding that the city recognize their union, provide a pay increase to \$2.35 an hour from an average of \$1.70, overtime pay, and promotions based on merit irrespective of race;

Whereas, on February 23, 1968, 1,500 strikers and supporters organized a march to the Memphis City Hall,

where, 11 days after the initial strike, the city council refused to recognize the union;

Whereas in the following days, 500 White labor union members joined members of the clergy and sanitation workers in a march downtown, 116 strikers and supporters were arrested during a peaceful demonstration, and hundreds of high school students joined in another march led by members of the clergy;

Whereas, on March 4, 1968, a proposal by State Senator Frank White to create a State mediation board to resolve the stalemate was rejected by Mayor Loeb;

Whereas, on March 28, 1968, a 16-year-old boy was shot to death by a Memphis police officer, police arrested 280 mostly Black demonstrators, and the State legislature authorized a 7:00 p.m. curfew which involved 4,000 members of National Guard moving in to Memphis;

Whereas, on April 3, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed a rally of 10,000 Black workers and residents, members of the clergy, White liberals, and union members for what would be his last speech, forever known for the phrase, "I have been to the mountain top," linking the civil rights and labor movements and urging compromise;

Whereas, on April 4, 1968, the day after his rallying cry for compromise, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated by a sniper on the balcony outside of his hotel room in Memphis;

Whereas, on April 8, 1968, an estimated 42,000 people, led by the wife of Dr. King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, peacefully marched in memory of Dr. King and in support of the union's request; and

Whereas, on April 16, 1968, AFSCME announced that a 14-month contract had been agreed to and accepted, and included union dues check-off, a grievance procedure, and wage increases of 10 cents an hour in May and another 5 cents in September, ending the 3-month strike: Now, therefore, be it

1       *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2               (1) recognizes the coordinated struggle of work-  
3       ers during the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers  
4       strike to voice their grievances and reach a collective  
5       agreement for rights in the workplace;

6               (2) honors the perseverance of the 1,300 mem-  
7       bers of Local 1733 in urging social and economic  
8       equality in the workplace; and

9               (3) recognizes the contributions of all those  
10       unnamed who participated in the fight for justice  
11       during the strike.

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