



SCLC Memphis

City Sleeping on Employee Grievances

**President Dwight Montgomery Tells Harvard Audience City
Employees Suffering
Under System of “Benign Neglect”**

Forty years after Dr. King’s death fighting for their rights, Memphis’s sanitation workers still fighting for dignity and respect. On the record: more than 50 complaints backlogged over a two year span.

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Memphis, TN...Having just returned from a pivotal labor issues conference at Harvard University, SCLC President Dr. Dwight Montgomery says the Memphis chapter will be stepping up its efforts to support the AFSCME Local #1733’s efforts to urge city leaders to address why sanitation workers in Memphis are still not treated with dignity and respect in the daily course of their jobs.

Harvard invited Montgomery to attend the 2008 African American Labor Leaders Economic Summit focusing on Labor and Religion. Convened May 7 and 8, Harvard’s John Trumpbour arranged Montgomery’s keynote dinner address to national labor leaders (including AFSCME national president Bill Lucy), fellow ministers, policy experts, key social scientists and Harvard alumnus and professors.

He reports, “I told them exactly what are our concerns. So many people from around the world came here to visit Memphis to honor the 40th anniversary of his death, yet we are ignoring the main concern that he was addressing during his visit to Memphis—that the sanitation workers receive fair, equitable and just treatment in exchange for their labor. People are being injured because the management is ignoring the workers concerns and this must stop.”

The irony of the situation is that Memphis now has an African American mayor, elected officials and upper level system employees. “We want to make it clear that we are not attacking the mayor. We have tremendous respect for him and he has proven on several occasions that he will take people to task and also fire people that are not getting the job done in a proper manner. And he needs to look into this. When there are people in city government who are not doing what they should be doing then they should be fired.

People are being ordered to go into the truck hoppers where there is feces, needles, broken glass and other dangerous matter without proper protection. They are working under intolerable conditions daily and we are solidly in unison with AFSCME's demand that it stop."

Examples of filed grievances

Source: AFSCME Local #1733

1-OJI - On The Job Injuries

This is a provision that the City attempted to seriously weaken and modify in the negotiations sessions that were just completed earlier this month. Several Solid Waste employees including our Chapter Chairperson, Keith Johnson were seriously injured only to have Supervisors arrive on the scene and take them to a clinic to get drug tested before they are subsequently taken to receive emergency medical care. These are men/women that have suffered broken limbs, serious cuts from refuse and/or had toxic chemicals backslash on them from the garbage blades on the rear of the truck.

2.-Forced to Clean the Bowels of the Truck

I've witnessed and stopped this temporarily firsthand at the Farrisview Installation Dumpsite Barn. The Supervisors would order men to climb inside the bowels where the garbage is compacted and clean it out in their normal work gear. The men did not have any protective gear, face respirator and protective boots/gloves. I ordered the men out of the truck and told the Supervisor that their lives were more important than their jobs. I could smell the stench of several things which almost choked me as I just stuck my head in for a moment.

OSHA cited the city for three serious violations in 2005 relative to protective gear, facial covered respirators w/an adequate place for storage and replacement filters and adequate training. As of today the city has supplied them with five florescent t-shirts and cotton masks for their work. The city contends they cannot afford to outfit workers with the proper protective gear from head to toe and have been extremely unremorseful and arrogant. After all, property and money take precedent over people.

3. Men and women are assigned trucks with faulty brake equipment, tires that are in need of replacement, inconsistent hydraulics, etc. If an accident occurs relative to any of these factors-they are summarily written up, drug tested and suspended until the City decides to scapegoat them or bring them back to work. In numerous instances, Supervisors were told by city officials to disregard any complaints of non-working equipment from employees that operate these vehicles unless it comes directly from city

management. So, often times these incidents are not even reported and fixed by city mechanics-it is a public safety hazard. If you couple these infractions with working in inclement weather-they are required to work in weather 15 degrees and above; you have a disaster in waiting.

4. Alton Jones, 15 year solid waste employee and chief shop steward is terminated after being randomly drug tested at or around the same time he calls OSHA in to conduct a site inspection in which the city received three citations. The city refused to release the results of his drug test for over 18 months. Mr. Jones has yet to be returned to work and has encountered a debilitating hip injury from hopping on and off dump trucks over the course of 15 years.

5. Public Works Supervisor, Sean Hilton orders drain maintenance workers pull a \$200,000 DINGO-ditch digging equipment out of a ditch and park it 300 yards down the road and dig the ditch with shovels in October of 2007 and later in the year orders men to stop using \$300.00 power chain saws on a heavily treed area and use axes to chop the trees. Both incidents were reported and Mr. Hilton did not receive on reprimand and is currently still supervising city employees.