

# **The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r**

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## **What I Found Myself Thinking About On Labor Day The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BC Editorial Board**

Virtually every Labor Day there is less and less discussion of workers and unions than the previous year. Many of us who have been deeply involved in the labor union movement bemoan this situation, sometimes complaining to the mainstream media about the lack of attention.

While it is true that the mainstream media largely ignores workers and unions, none of this will change in the absence of a change in the labor movement. It is analogous to those who complain about the lack of education in the public schools about unions. Why should this be a surprise? In the absence of a vibrant movement combined with right-wingers taking over school boards, this is precisely what one should expect.

Greater attention will not come to workers and unions through an expanded labor press or even a labor television network, though both of these would certainly help. The reality is that there is no quick fix because what is really needed is a reconfigured/reformed labor movement. Labor gets attention when it is in action. And this goes beyond a particular demonstration or picket line. It means sustained action.

In 1969 there was a major strike in Charleston, South Carolina. It was the famous Hospital Workers Strike that represented an unusual alliance between the hospital workers (members of Local 1199/Drug, Hospital and Healthcare Workers Union) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was a fight for justice and addressed both

issues of economic justice and racial justice. This became a defining moment for Charleston. There was energy.

Too many activities by today's labor movement lack the sense of...a movement. That does not mean that there is an absence of struggle. Rather, what the Charleston Hospital Workers strike and what the labor upsurge of the 1930s - 1940s captured was a broader vision of economic justice. You know when you are in such a moment. There is a way that people who are not necessarily directly involved or directly affected choose sides and, frequently, get involved the best that they can.

On Labor Day, activists in labor unions, worker centers, independent worker organizations, and labor studies programs (at colleges and universities) need to take the moment for thinking about vision and strategy. Rather than focusing on how we are ignored, we need to think about how we need to change our own movement so that we are better positioned to win.

God knows, workers in this country need to start winning, regardless of who comes out on top on November 6, 2012.

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