

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

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First Class Attitudes

M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

As I boarded a plane today, I was confronted by what I call a first class attitude. A passenger had put his/her fairly large bag in the overhead bin where it did not fit. It was simply too long, and it was left sticking out beyond possibility of the bin closing. I'm really not sure what he or she expected to happen. I can only assume that the passenger expected a flight attendant to make it fit; that the staff would fix it. Those of us who are privileged to travel by airplane have most likely had a similar experience.

Most airlines offer a first class experience. There is more space, customer service is ramped up, and they serve pretty good food. However, classism has a far broader reach than the airline industry alone. There are so many other places where first class behavior and first class attitudes seem to be the norm in our country where we claim to be a working class society.

The most recent one is the offensive on our working class neighbors who are employed in the public sector. I do not understand why those work for cities, counties, states, and school districts have become the target of our disdain. In states like Wisconsin and Ohio, our "public" officials have determined that unions and collective bargaining are the cause of the economic downturn so they must be done away with. Have we forgotten that the economic crash was the result of corrupt business practices in the financial industry, not in the

public service arena? Have we forgotten that in some states, the budget crisis is because they have continued to cut taxes thereby reducing revenues?

Unions are not perfect just as no other organization is perfect. However, unions are owned by their members; members who can exercise their voting rights to change what is not working. They were formed out of a need to improve working conditions. We must not forget that most of us have benefitted by collective bargaining negotiations and now we benefit from the gifts of collective bargaining, such as paid vacations, sick leave, safety in the workplace, etc. It seems odd that our democratic system that treasures voting rights has somehow decided to negate the voting rights of people who have organized unions for a purpose.

We have watched the middle class disappear in nations throughout the world. But we have failed to acknowledge that our country is headed in the same direction. Data proves that the middle class is essential to any flourishing economic system. Public workers are at the core of a middle class society that cares for its working class. Just yesterday, the Cleveland Plain Dealer published the results of a survey that indicates that 40% of those polled would be willing to have their taxes raised and only 20% advocate for public workers to lose their benefits.

Who are our elected officials listening to? I hope you will join me by voicing your support of the bargaining rights of teachers, garbage and highway workers, police and fire fighters, office workers in schools, city halls and state office buildings, and so on. Those who work in public sector jobs, members of working class America, deserve to be treated with first class respect.

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