

Letter from the Editor

Communications is an art more than a science; if it were the latter, there would be formulas, an obvious path, and lots of great communicators. But in fact there are precious few individuals who can deliver a message that changes views and moves people to action.

John Kennedy, the first president born in the 20th century, fostered the idealism of a young generation by asking them to serve their nation by improving the world.

Ronald Reagan, whose folksy manner let him say much in few words, uplifted the national spirit while driving home his view that the ingenuity of a free people—in America, in the Soviet Union—could solve most of society's problems.

Bill Clinton combined a nuanced grasp of issues with a penetrating intellect that helped him present complex ideas while keeping the attention of an easily distracted public.

So, there have been in our time a few great communicators in public office.

And then there was Martin Luther King, who stood alone. His words and speeches moved a country and altered its history. He influenced the beliefs and actions of tens of millions on racial equality, and subsequently on issues of war and peace, the merits of non-violence, the dignity of the poor and the need to end poverty, the rights of working people—all before he was felled at age 39.

He achieved this not merely because of the rhythmic cadence with which this southern preacher spoke, the eloquence of his words, the wisdom that belied his years or the righteousness of his cause.

Dr. King reached so many because his speeches were not about him or his beliefs. They were about us. He prevailed despite overwhelming odds because he understood the need to help people realize their stake in the struggle he was leading. He appealed to our values, to our conscience, and ultimately to our own self-interest.

Only by helping America live up to its highest ideals, he convinced us, would we fully realize our own potential and build a society worthy of our children.

Why do I dwell here on Martin Luther King? Not because the nation celebrated his birthday a few weeks ago. Not because we are celebrating Black History Month as I write

this. Rather, because few factors will be more pivotal in whether the labor movement survives the current assault—or whether the NALC helps save the Postal Service—than our ability to learn from what Dr. King so masterfully did.

We need to make this about those we speak to, to show them what is at stake here. The majesty of the civil rights movement was unique, but our fight as letter carriers—more than most labor campaigns—has the potential to resonate deeply with the public.

We are not fighting for hefty pay raises or even for fair treatment. We are fighting to serve our country as called for in the Constitution, to carry out the highest ideals of public service, to link this vast land and to bind individual communities together, to promote the well-being of underserved populations and the elderly and small businesses struggling to make it, to preserve a treasured part of the American experience for our customers' children.

We are fighting for millions who rely on us; our adversaries are fighting to destroy public service for political and financial gain.

And so, even as we ponder tactics and numbers and process, we also need to rally people by appealing to their highest ideals and to their belief in what is best about our country.

The Rev. King demonstrated something else as well—the importance of steadfastness, of persistence. As President Rolando told the AFL-CIO's January 2011 national King celebration in Cincinnati, "Remember, Dr. King never backed down when things were tough, he never hesitated when faced with tough odds, he never turned around when the path ahead was risky. Instead, he said—rather, he sang—'We shall not be moved.' The bridge from Selma to Montgomery may have posed dangers, but Martin Luther King didn't flinch. He crossed that bridge. And so shall we. It is incumbent upon us, my brothers and sisters, to overcome the challenges of our time."

Our president was speaking to, and about, workers in general, but his words apply aptly to us. Our union has a proud history and a dedicated membership that provides exceptional service. We are the nation's most-trusted public servants, we are an essential part of the daily lives of every community we serve, and we too will cross that bridge. ☐



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