

## Our fight



**Mack I.  
Julion**

**O**ver the past year, the NALC has adopted the slogan “Fight like hell!” against the attacks on the Postal Service and in our pursuit of a fair contract for letter carriers. That slogan is also indicative of the tenacity of letter carriers. I recently told a class of new hires that to endure the daily grind of performing our duties in extreme weather conditions, while dealing with incompetent supervisors and hostile work environments in some offices, you have to be mentally built for this. You have to have a fighting spirit. I firmly believe that’s who we are.

This past January, at an annual conference in celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I was surrounded by others with that same fighting spirit. Activists from across the country were there representing every labor union and constituency group of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). We stood in solidarity, reaffirming our commitment to fight not only for our workers’ rights, but also for issues related to social justice that affect our rights.

**As labor unionists that is what we do. Many of us** got involved because we are willing to fight, not only for our rights, but for those of the least among us. We have a disdain for the bullies (management) who pick on those who don’t know their rights or are not capable of defending themselves. We are stronger if we stick together. When we fight, we win.

If we allow them to pick us off one by one, there will be no one left to stand with us when they inevitably come our way. It’s the age-old tactic of divide and conquer; and a major lesson we learned from the horrors of Nazi Germany that led to World War II. Every day we see what is transpiring in our country right before our very eyes, so that comparison is not hyperbole. The eerie similarities of that fascist and racist regime, with the current unlawful actions of our own government and the unaccountable behavior of a gestapo enforcement agency, should be alarming and terrifying to us all. Even if we think that it has nothing to do with “us,” history tells us otherwise.

At this AFL-CIO labor conference, participating and interacting with others in the labor movement was as inspiring as it was encouraging. One workshop made me feel like we were living in another time. It was about behaving with non-violent passive resistance in marches or protests.

**I have always been captivated by the turbulent fight** for civil rights during the 1960s. I have often said that I should have been of age at that time. The movement, the music, the martyrs of struggle—Dr. King, Malcolm, Evers, the Kennedys—and the other icons who made our country great by their willingness to stand on the right side of history. Those willing to sacrifice everything with freedom rides and boycotts. It’s easy to look back and think, “They were doing the right things for the right reasons. I would have been out there protesting, too!”

Well, the question before us today is, are we willing to fight for our democracy and for future generations like those before us? In the ‘60s, many labor organizations understood the assignment. They marched shoulder to shoulder and helped finance the civil rights movement. Walter Reuther and the United Auto Workers played a huge part in the battles for social justice and human rights. Sacrifices made for this nation were not always made on battlefields in foreign lands, but right here on our own soil.

At this time, lives have already been lost in Minneapolis and elsewhere, with the potential to get worse before it gets better. Like the biblical account of the good Samaritan, the question isn’t “what will happen to me if I say or do something?” but rather “What will happen to me and others if I say or do nothing?”

At the conference, the message was made clear—that, in our fight for justice, LGBT rights and immigrant rights, like civil rights and women’s rights, are human rights. And human rights are workers’ rights; thus, this is our fight, too!

**President John F. Kennedy once stated of labor unions** that we have not only “brought justice and democracy to the shop floor,” but that our “work goes beyond our own jobs, and even beyond our borders.” He went on to say, “They have spoken, not for narrow self-interest, but for the public interest and for the people.” He is correct; that is a part of the history of the labor movement. In the words of Dr. King: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

We should all stand on that *10 toes down*.