

Seeking Justice: A Spiritual Practice

“And the heavens proclaim God’s righteousness, for God is a God of justice” (Psalm 50:6)

I have joined the ranks of the protesters. I do so because I believe God is a God of justice. The issue at hand is both simple and complex.

On one hand, our newly-elected governor is trying to balance the budget and reduce spending. He says this is why he was elected. But the primary way he appears to be doing is by forcing state and municipal employees to do four things: 1) and 2) contribute more money towards their health insurance and retirement accounts, 3) take a cut in wages and 4) agree to give up their right to collective bargaining.

As I see the issue unfold, workers are willing to do the first three things -- but not the fourth. Collective bargaining is a worker’s right that should never be surrendered or taken away. If money was the only issue on the table then the governor and legislature would have a deal. But money isn’t the only issue. The other issue is power – the power of an employer to hire and direct workers who, after this bill is passed, won’t have the right to meet with them regarding their “wages, hours and conditions of work.” And that, my friends, is an issue of justice and an issue of justice is a matter of one’s spirituality.

Last Saturday, while marching on the Capitol Square, I heard some counter-demonstrators shouting at the public employees: “We don’t have two weeks’ vacation, health insurance, or a retirement plan – why should you?” I think the response to this is simply, “You should!” Yes, every worker should have a paid vacation, health insurance, and a retirement plan as a matter of economic justice.

In a free society, even a society like ours with a capitalist economy, workers should never be treated as commodities – that is injustice. Workers are important resources that need to be treated with dignity, respect, listened to, and given the opportunity for personal growth in their work-life.

But more than that, collective bargaining is a human right. Our nation has led the way in developing a high-quality, educated workforce; that’s what gives us our economic advantage in the world. To step back and deny workers the right to collectively bargain is both short-sighted and wrong. Simply stated, the governor is wrong in trying to take away the right of workers to collectively bargain. Workers have the right to protest and even strike to assure this right is not taken away. People of faith, and belief in a God of justice, need to support them in this important struggle which is, essentially, a spiritual practice!

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