

Speech for SFLC Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast
By Shon Buford, Fire Fighters 798
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“...I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world.”

From Dr. MLK Jr speech in Memphis, April 1968

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters of Labor. Greetings friends of Labor. Greetings to all here this morning.

It is both a privilege and honor to be able to stand before you, brothers and sisters of labor, on this illustrious occasion, as we remember Dr. King on his birthday.

I would like to take the words of Dr. King and start again, changing a few words, as it relates to us, in organized labor.

I'm delighted to see each of you here this morning, in spite of a storm warning up at City Hall. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in San Francisco, something is happening in our world.

Dr. King has always been a part of me. Although he died before my birth, I am thankful for the many men and women in my life who were transformed by his vision.

Although Dr. King is mostly known for his works in the civil rights movement, his eloquent speeches, and for his beliefs in the non-violence, I'm going to take the next few minutes, to talk about Dr. King, and how his involvement in the labor movement has influenced me, to do the same.

Dr. Martin Luther King, stood for fair treatment of all people. People from of all walks of life, beliefs, and economic status. It was this belief in fairness and justice that led him down to Memphis, in April 1968, to stand up for the rights of Memphis Sanitation Workers, Local 1733.

Dr. King was the voice of this movement, and after his assassination, men and women, like ourselves, had to look deep inside themselves, and say..., “we are not going to let injustice stop us from receiving our justice.” They picked up their signs, they marched in their streets, they picked up the phones, and let the voice of justice be heard.

Brother and sisters, those storms that Dr. King described in his speech in 1968 have returned, but this time it's not in Memphis; it's in San Francisco. There is an anti-labor movement on the rise. Big Business and City Hall are using these economic times to attempt to roll back the wages and benefits of working men and women.

Let us not sit idle and allow Big Business and City Hall attack our rights to collective bargaining. Let's not let them attack our pensions. Let's not let them attack our health care, like they're trying to do with Local 2, but let's stand united, and fight for fairness.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not recognize that we are in difficult economic times. As union leaders and workers, we have to be flexible... With that said, Big Business, and the City of San Francisco have something they must also realize: that we the members in the labor community are not going allow them to make us scapegoats by blaming us for their mismanagement of funds.

Brother and sisters of labor, let us honor Dr. King today by remembering his words of equality and justice. Let us honor him by continuing to share his message with others.

Thank You.