

Denise Giardina: Daily Mail oblivious to irony, value of unions

By Denise Giardina

The January 18 edition of the Daily Mail's editorial page featured not one, but two editorials supporting so-called "right-to-work" legislation. It is clear the editors know nothing of the contributions of unions to the well-being of this nation and its people, nothing about the way unions function, and nothing about the long roller coaster of gains and losses for working (and middle-class) people in this country.

To add insult to injury, the editorials were followed by a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle," Dr. King said. The Daily Mail editorialists, who apparently felt obliged to provide a brief tip of the hat on MLK's birthday, seem oblivious to the irony. Dr. King was describing precisely the achievements for justice and equality that the editorialists are so ready to drop into the trashcan.

On Tuesday, Jan. 26, at 9 p.m., the PBS series "American Experience" will give a national airing to a documentary about the West Virginia Mine Wars. I recommend that West Virginians watch to better understand what our ancestors went through to bring strong unions to this state. We all benefit from the improved working conditions and higher wages they achieved. I pray we are not the generation to turn our backs on them and their memory and set West Virginia once again on a backward course.

As for Dr. King, I would point out that he was a strong supporter of unions, and was killed while standing up for the rights of striking garbage workers in Memphis. He understood very well the attacks upon unions, which have been going on since the 19th century. Here is another quote from Dr. King, this one about "right-to-work" laws in 1961: "In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right to work.' It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights. Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions of everyone. ... Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer and there are no civil rights."

And the struggle continues.

Denise Giardina is the author of "Storming Heaven" and "The Unquiet Earth."