

TESTIMONY ON GUN VIOLENCE

1/29/13

I'm Bill Shortell, Political Director of the Eastern Territory Conference of Machinists. We do not have a position on this issue and I am speaking as an individual. As a long-time member of an organization of mostly working class men, I have insights into the collective approach to troubling questions like this.

I support the proposed legislation. I also believe that the wide chasm in our nation about guns will not be bridged by insults. Those of us who say humanity can live without guns should never taunt and inflame the other side.

In the Machinist Union our constitution prohibits personal attacks against fellow members. This solidarity brings us thru a lot of turmoil. I have personal experience dealing in a brotherly way with people with guns, who scared my fellow members. These are best shared in private, if any legislators are interested.

If we really expect to resolve the crisis, we have to focus on support and guidance for the whole community, not simply on the very small number who are at risk for violent behavior.

SUPPORT SYSTEM BROKEN

People my age have lived thru a breath-taking collapse of community. Although there are some exceptions, especially among new immigrants, we have seen the neighborhood, the extended family, and even the nuclear family fall apart. This means that millions of lonely, troubled people have nowhere to turn, except to professional help, which will never be enough to cope with the enormous need, or to drugs, which mostly mask the problem, and often produce terrible side effects.

I want to propose here a much more radical approach to tragic violence than gun control or increased police or social work. I think that our legislators need to examine re-building community-sized groups, with material subsidy and professional guidance. It is only in community that troubled people, in a natural, informal way can find the nurturing that will integrate them, rather than eject them like a missile aimed at our innocents.

We are used to breaking bonds to find a job a thousand miles away. To reverse this, to encourage people to stay put long enough to get to know and love a whole community of hundreds of people, is a revolutionary project.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO REBUILD COMMUNITY

We have a beginning of an understanding of how to do this in our churches, our unions, and our social service system. I propose we take our collective memory, energize it with the vow of "Never Again" coming out of Newtown, and begin plans now for a new secure and loving community for our children.