

The Fraternal Order of Police, the union of Chicago area police officers, has recently urged its membership to withhold contributions from the United Way to protest the charitable organization's providing of a \$250,000 grant to a small legal aid service that plans to provide attorneys to indigent suspects during interrogation at Chicago area police stations. Although suspects have a constitutional right to an attorney at the police station, they are not entitled to free representation until their first court appearance. The United Way could lose hundreds of thousands of dollars if large numbers of city and suburban police officers cancel their automatic payroll deductions. Fraternal Order of Police President William Nolan wrote in the union's newsletter: "What the United Way in essence is telling everybody is that they would rather spend money to help suspected murderers, rapists, and other criminals, than helping other people who are in dire need of worthwhile charity."

Is the attitude of the Fraternal Order of Police toward the United Way morally justifiable? If so, why? If not, why not? (reported in the Chicago Sun Times 3/13/95)

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The attitude of the police union, though in some ways understandable, is not morally justifiable. Everyone arrested for a crime has a constitutional right to representation by an attorney. Allegations of police brutality and coercion often occur in the gap between arrest and a court appearance. The objective of the new service provided by the small organization United Way decided to fund aims to make the constitutionally guaranteed right to representation by an attorney a reality for people who cannot exercise this right owing to lack of funds.

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