

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Witness for Justice #545

September 12, 2011

Three Day Weekends

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Hooray for three-day weekends! Every time one of these three-day weekends rolls around, we celebrate having an extra day for getting some overdue tasks done, spending extra time with family or friends, or just getting a little more rest. However, the third day, usually Monday is really meant for a reason. These Mondays are set aside to acknowledge an historic and significant part of our culture.

For example, last Monday we observed Labor Day. I wonder how much attention we actually gave to the historic intent of Labor Day. In case we might have forgotten, Labor Day was created to support the labor movement in this country and dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions that workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.”

In the midst of this yearly national tribute to workers, public policies are enacted or being considered that contradict this historic value that we claim to hold so dear. During these times of economic stress, the first victims of budget reductions are the very labor force we recognize. Labor unions are blamed for the downturn in our economy while elected officials rush to “protect” the prosperity of those holding the most wealth. Anti-collective bargaining laws are

now legislated in at least two states and are being considered in others. In addition, our support for basic workers' health and safety rights is eroding.

This year, we will observe the 10th Anniversary of September 11. We appropriately honor those who died on that tragic day; however, we must also remember the impact on thousands of workers who continue to suffer in the aftermath. We publicly applaud the self-less efforts of rescue workers, both paid and volunteers, but continue to put barriers in their way to needed health and mental health services.

Just recently, Congress passed the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010 (H.R. 847), which is intended to "improve health services and provide financial compensation for 9/11 first responders who were exposed to dangerous toxins and are now sick as a result." However, a condition of receiving services is the requirement that applicants must be screened to ensure that they are not on the FBI terrorist watch list. So, the thousands of courageous workers and volunteers who braved the storm of fire, smoke, and flying debris to save human lives must be questioned about their connection to terrorism? This does not honor the dedicated workers who risked their own lives to save others on September 11.

Workers are still as much the foundation, strength, and prosperity of our culture as they were over 100 years ago on the first Labor Day. We must also support the thousands who wait in the unemployment lines; they want to work and contribute to the well-being of our culture. They are not to blame for the economic ills of this country.

So, it makes me curious about why we continue to observe the yearly national tribute we call Labor Day. Is it because we really respect the contributions of our nation's workers or we hate to give up that three-day weekend?

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