



Labor Day, 2017

Labor Day Is For All Who Have Labored

Labor Day, the first Monday in September, was created by the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.

Labor Day should also be a time of remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. One of the bills I wrote and passed in 2010 designated March 25 of each year as the Day of Remembrance of the victims of slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, a day for the people of our state to commemorate and reflect upon the contributions of African American slaves to Illinois and to the United States. This date is in concert with the United Nations' International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. When we think of Labor Day, we can't forget about the labor which was actually free labor that helped to build our country. Slave labor was without union protections, but it was labor that helped to stimulate the recognition of the need for workers' protections. The fact is that slave labor was the foundation of our country's development, and no labor like slave labor contributed more to the strength and prosperity of our country like free slave labor.

This Labor Day, I will remember the contributions of civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In the 1920s, a group of disgruntled Pullman porters in New York City asked an African-American labor militant, A. Philip Randolph, a strong advocate for the rights of black working men and women, to form an independent union of sleeping car porters and maids. The porters worked for the Pullman Company, whose founder, George Pullman, invented the overnight sleeping train car in the 1880s in Chicago. Pullman hired black men and women to serve as porters and maids to the mostly white passengers who used the cars. By using blacks in this service capacity, he was drawing upon the master-servant relationship of slavery days when blacks were servants to white masters. Randolph organized the Pullman porters, with 20,000 members strong, the first African American union chartered in the United States, gaining better working conditions for the workers.

This Labor Day should also be a day to call for increased diversity of all labor unions in Illinois. If we are going to end the violence in the city of Chicago, putting people to work is part of the solution, and having access to union jobs can help. We must see more black people in union jobs. I urge union leaders to remember the shoulders of black labor that have been built upon since our country's beginnings, and hire more black people for good paying union jobs.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District