

## *Labor Day, 2017*

Labor Day, which was first made an official American Federal holiday in 1894, is upon us once again and American working folks in virtually every occupation and every walk of life continue to take it on the chin despite the promises made during the recent presidential campaign. Since Ronald Reagan broke the Air Traffic controllers' union in 1981, then known as PATCO, union represented working men and women have been viewed by many as the "bad guys." Take a quick look around to confirm this. President Donald Trump swore during the campaign that he is for the "middle class," yet where can you find any people from this economic group in his current Cabinet? The U.S. Secretary of Labor is a Harvard Law School graduate. His predecessor's pay was about \$200,000 per year, plus benefits. He sure has a lot in common with working men and women, doesn't he?

Let's hope that we see some change, but without some dramatic changes forthcoming, we will witness no more than a continued "race to the bottom" for many American workers. Hopefully, some of our current "free trade" agreements, which are anything but "free," will be renegotiated as promised, but this is yet another open question that remains to be seen. Without this, employers will continue to claim that they "can't compete" with workers in the lower paid foreign countries. In turn, this will translate into further cuts in pay, retirement, medical and other necessary benefits for the American workers and their families. During the last fiscal quarter, the average American worker's pay rose a measly one tenth of one percent. Compare this to the increased costs of items like food, fuel and housing.

Unfortunately, today's definition of Labor Day amounts to no more than a sad and comical fairytale for most American workers, except it's no joke. Striking workers in the past were sometimes beaten, wounded or even killed for exercising their right to strike. Various States were recently forced to raise the minimum wage because jobs that in the not too distant past were temporary or for entry level young people just out of or still in high school, today turn out to be permanent. Labor Day has turned into a national holiday where the politicians from both parties pander and lie to the workers who put them into office, while these same lawmakers consider themselves to be a privileged class with pay and benefits that most workers could only dream of achieving. It's also on Labor Day weekend when large retailers offer goods, many made in China, at alleged sale prices and further line their pockets, while their employees are paid minimum wages and Mom and Pop stores are simultaneously priced out of business. We were also promised "change" by the last U.S. President, and all we got was a hollow plea for Congress to ratify the trans-Pacific "free trade" agreement that thankfully fell upon deaf ears.

The ones I truly feel sorry for are our children and grandchildren, who will most likely never know the way things were and the hope the **real** America once held for everyone, and the way it could be once again, because the *true* labor leaders are long gone, superseded by greedy fat cats who are more concerned with lining their own pockets than helping or protecting the working folks that they were elected or appointed to represent.

A fairly paid and skilled American work force is what generated the unique American dream that was made up by the middle class, which in turn made this country extraordinarily different and great. Without them..? You can fill in the blanks for the rest of that sentence, but I think we can all see what transpires around us on a daily basis. Perhaps one day, just maybe, hopefully our Republic can reawaken the spirit that it once proudly stood for — but the jury is still out.

On that would-be note, my friends, as a former union official I wish all of you a happy Labor Day.

- *George*