

## James L. Holly, M.D.

### Protecting Our Prosperity by Protecting Those Who Produced It

By James L. Holly, MD

Labor Day

September 4, 2006

Special to the *Examiner*

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

Matthew Maguire, later the secretary of Local 344 of the International Association of Machinists in Paterson, N.J., proposed the holiday in 1882 while serving as secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York. The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City.

By 1894, 24 states had adopted the holiday in honor of workers, and on June 28 of that year, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories.

Few things illustrate the importance of the spirit and the message of Labor Day as the Titanic. How so, you might ask? Upon hearing of the tragedy of the Titanic's sinking, Winston Churchill wrote: "The Titanic disaster is the prevailing theme here. The story is a good one. The strict observance of the great traditions of the sea towards women and children reflects nothing but honor upon our civilization...I cannot help feeling proud of our race and its traditions as proved by this event. Boat loads of women and children tossing on the sea – safe and sound – and the rest – Silence. Honor to their memory."

Forty-eight hours later, Churchill added the following comment: "The whole episode fascinates me. It shows that in spite of all the inequalities and artificialities of our modern life, at the bottom, tested to its foundations, our civilization is humane, Christian and absolutely democratic. How differently Imperial Rome or Ancient Greece would have settled the problem. The swells, the potentates would have gone off with their concubines and pet slaves and soldier guards, and then the sailors would have had their chance headed by the captain; as for the rest – whoever could bribe the crew the most would have had the preference and the rest could go to hell. **But such ethics can neither build Titanics with science nor lose them with honor.**"

Labor is about building and at its foundation a nation of builders – indeed a nation of laborers – not only produces "things," but also creates an ethic which fashions the character of a nation. Elitists measure value by leisure, privilege, power, wealth and indolence wrought by that wealth. Labor measures value by the pride of productivity and

the right and ability of all to participate in and enjoy the prosperity generated by their efforts.

In no nation was the work of labor valued as it has been in the United States of America. No where did artisans take the designs and technologies of science and transform them into buildings and roads and schools and shops and homes, as in the USA. No where did laborers use their muscle, minds and motivation to transform a frontier into the mightiest and noblest nation ever upon the earth. The heritage of America does not belong to the entrepreneurs nor to the scions of commerce, but to the men and women who working for wages, year after year, delivered the products and progress which fashioned America.

Yet, today, the pressure to depreciate the value of labor is great. Global markets argue that wages must be compressed to compete with emerging and developing economies which have not yet discovered the value of the labor force. Progress, we are told, will be found by turning back the clock to where laborers will be paid half, or less of what they currently earn. Of course, the entrepreneurs and the scions of commerce will continue to make their six, seven and eight digit salaries.

Edmund Burke said, “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” This is true of those who would compromise the value of labor for short-term economic benefit. While he resisted collective bargaining and labor unions, Henry Ford understood the value of the laborer. He determined to build an automobile which could be afforded by the workers who assembled the vehicles. Few appreciated that this genius idea was the foundation of the ultimate promise of the industrial revolution.

No longer were laborers to look through the show window at the toys of the rich and powerful. Laborers would now share those toys which their hands and backs built. Not since the abolition of slavery had such a radical idea been advanced. The ultimate statement of the value of labor was that the laborer should and could afford to enjoy what he built. Those who do not know this history can do irreparable harm to the fabric of this nation if they allow an economic enslavement of the American worker who will no longer be able to share the dream which is founded upon America’s valuation of labor.

As we celebrate this Labor Day, let us give thanks to God for His Providence in blessing America with prosperity and let us give thanks to those men and women who dreamed of a better nation as they reported for work day after day, creating that prosperity for all. Let us also give thanks for the captains of industry who recognized that their success depended upon the success and well-being of the work force in America. And, let us rededicate ourselves to the proposition that “all men are created equal...(and) are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...(including) life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Let us commit never to allow laws, treaties, practices or attitudes to develop which would “turn the clock back” to where the laborer would slave in intolerable conditions for unlivable wages, for if we do, we shall all suffer.