Dear IFPTE Sisters, Brothers, and Siblings:

As we celebrate Labor Day 2021, it is worth reflecting on the unprecedented challenges that workers have faced during one of the most challenging eighteen months in recent history. The shutdown of our economies, the closures of our schools, and the upheaval of our everyday lives have put a tremendous strain on all of us as workers, both physically and mentally. Workers everywhere, including the 90,000-plus represented IFPTE members, have strived to stay safe from COVID-19, while also struggling to pay the bills and provide for our families.

The one thing that has become clear to our society throughout this struggle is the importance of workers and their significance to our survival. Our medical professionals, including thousands represented by IFPTE, have been working around the clock to save lives; the retail, grocery and essential service workers who show up to work day-in and day-out, to provide us our foods, medicines, and items that we all need to survive; the government workers who make sure that our essential public services continue to be provided, particularly to our most vulnerable citizens; the sanitation workers that empty our garbage and clean our streets; the energy workers that keep the lights on for us; the educators that teach our children; the transportation workers that get us from point A to point B… These workers and many, many more put their own health and safety on the line to serve others.

The funny thing is that these are workers and services that were all too often taken for granted pre-pandemic. Indeed, the workers that we have depended on our entire lives now have a new meaning, a new appreciation. When we go to a grocery store today most of us now understand that the person scanning our groceries, or filling our prescriptions is doing so while putting their own safety at risk; before we just walked in, got our groceries, and left without thinking much about it. If there is one positive that has come from this pandemic it is the realization that “All Work Has Dignity.”

As trade unionists, we understand many employers and corporate leaning politicians view workers as nothing more than an expense. They believe that workers are expendable. For example, from 1997 until recently, the Business Roundtable, which represents corporate CEO’s, boasted a Statement of Purpose that claimed that a corporation’s primary existence is to serve shareholders. As workers, as a union and as a labor movement, we must never lose focus that it is our responsibility to continue to organize and grow union density to force corporations to understand that it is their workforce that is responsible for the profits, not the shareholders nor the CEOs, and it is the employees that will share in those profits.

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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, once said, “No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.” While this sentiment is lost on corporate boards, CEOs, and misguided politicians, it is recognized and appreciated today by society more than it has been in a long time.

Many of us will celebrate Labor Day with our families, attend a Labor Day parade or festivity, have cookouts, take in a ballgame, or spend time with our families, friends, and coworkers. As we do, let’s also find time to “thank” a worker and remember that “All Work Has Dignity.”

Happy Labor Day and In Solidarity,

Matthew S. Biggs
President

Gay Henson
Secretary-Treasurer