

August 10, 2021

An Open Letter to our Brothers and Sisters of the Labor Movement:

First days are always a little bit weird. Awkward, stressful, nerve-wracking. But in our profession, the theatre, “first days” are usually a common occurrence. As theatre arts-workers we start many “new jobs” every year as we move from contract to contract, from show to show. But for many, today is the first first since 2019. We are nervous - even a little bit scared - but nonetheless chomping at the bit to get back in the game. We are wondering if we still remember how to diligently and rigorously work on our craft, if we remember how to look others in the eye with bravery and openness, if we remember how to breathe together.

We are also wondering if we’ve forgotten. We hope we’ve forgotten the habits of racism in our rehearsal halls, while remembering the harm that has been inflicted; forgotten the shallow hustle of our industry, while remembering the humanity of its artists; forgotten the infectious “scarcity mentality,” while remembering that we deserve fair compensation for our work. And I, personally, hope we’ve forgotten how to make the easy, comfortable, simple “shows” that sell instead of serve.

Today, as we begin rehearsal for *Working, A Musical*, the headliner event of WORKING IN DC, my mind is full of thoughts of the late President Rich Trumka. My deepest condolences to those of you who knew and loved President Trumka as your leader, friend, and brother. I only had the chance to meet President Trumka once, and it was at a meeting for WORKING - where he offered his fierce and whole-hearted support of our project. He told me how important it is to tell the stories of workers, he told me that arts and culture play a huge role in changing the public narrative of labor. He talked about how he saw the arts as a tool, an underutilized organizing method, for inspiring the labor movement. When someone like Brother Trumka tells you: “this sounds like a great idea - I’m gonna say yes - let’s make it happen,” - you do. You make it happen. This tiny moment of intersection with Rich Trumka is a blip on the map of his life of influence - I am one of millions that he inspired to fight hard for what you believe in, to do what was right, to stand in solidarity, and to go for it - with clarity, thoughtful curiosity, and deep passion.

We at WORKING IN DC will carry this inspiration with us as we go to work today. We will enter the rehearsal hall with fire in our bellies, solidarity in our actions, and passion in our work that will make President Trumka, and all of you, proud.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shanara Gabrielle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shanara & the whole Working In DC Team