

## Black History Month

# The Gentle Warrior: A. Philip Randolph

By KEITH EDWARDS

Asa Philip Randolph was one of the greatest and most effective civil rights and labor leaders of the 20th century. Randolph was on the leading edge of social and political change. Although Randolph had many successes, he also had many failures.

By the early 1920s, he had run for political office on three different occasions only to be defeated every time. When Randolph arrived in New York in 1911, he put himself in the thick of the struggle for freedom and equality for Black Americans. A group of Pullman porters came to Randolph asking for his assistance in gaining the right to bargain for better wages and working conditions. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was launched Aug. 25, 1925. Through many attacks from the Pullman Company, lack of support by the law, failed mediation and arbitration, the workers prepared for a strike. The strike was called off at the last moment.

The Brotherhood was now in a struggle to survive without funds, little support from the outside, and in the

middle of the Great Depression. Randolph traveled on Brotherhood business with meager funds but with one strong message "Black men are able to measure up." This led to winning an election, in 1935, supervised by the National Mediation Board. That same year, the AFL reversed its position and granted an international charter to the Brotherhood. After two years of negotiations the Pullman Company signed a contract.

Prior to WWII, after being told by President Roosevelt to make him do something regarding the discrimination in American factories, Randolph traveled the country in an effort to unite Blacks against being shut out of well-paying factory jobs. All over the U.S., Blacks began forming committees to "March on Washington" in protest. Finally FDR signed an execu-



utive order in June of 1941. This was the beginning of 'fair employment practices.' Nearly seven years later Randolph persuaded President Truman to sign an executive order ending discrimination in the military and federal civil service jobs.

By 1955, A. Philip Randolph was well respected as a relentless advocate for justice and equality for Blacks, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and poor Whites — those who were disenfranchised. That same year Randolph became a vice-president of the AFL-CIO Executive Council. Randolph had put organized labor in a frontline role in the civil rights revolution. He believed that Black or White, workers and their labor unions are the key forces in any political effort to redistribute society's wealth more justly. Though Randolph was well aware that many unions discriminated, he continued in his convic-

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tion that only through the organization of the workers into unions could society be changed.

Randolph was approached by James Farmer (CORE), John Lewis (SNCC), Martin Luther King Jr. (SCLC), Roy Wilkins (NAACP) and Whitney Young (Urban League) to organize the 1963 March on Washington. Randolph agreed, if Bayard Rustin could assist him in the planning and mobilization. Somewhere between 250,000 and 400,000 marchers attended the event, where MLK Jr. gave his "I Have A Dream" speech. In 1964, Randolph was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Johnson.

*(Editor's Note: Keith Edwards is an international representative of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and a former business manager of Portland-based IBEW Local 48.)*

## Eryn Slack hired at Labor's Community Service Agency

Eryn Slack has been hired as a part-time office manager for Labor's Community Service Agency.

Slack has been in the labor movement since 2007, where she left a job as a waitress and shop steward at the Portland Hilton for a position with UNITE HERE Local 9, which represents workers at the hotel.

Last year, UNITE HERE asked her to take a resource navigator workshop conducted by Labor's Community Service Agency. The program is designed to help union activists assist members of their union during any difficult times they may encounter.

"Because of this partnership, our union became stronger and our members healthier," Slack said.

Slack became "passionately involved" with the resource navigator program, joining its steering committee. "Our vision is to have trained staff and membership navigators at every union, so a union member in need doesn't have to look far for help," she said.

As office manager of Labor's Community Service Agency, Slack joined Office and Professional Employees Local 11.

# You're supported



To be your best, it's important to have a strong partner. Kaiser Permanente's Salem-area service director, Gena Bailey, was recently recognized by the Oregon Chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association with its annual Management Practitioner Award. The award goes to managers whose accomplishments and approach to labor relations are widely admired by labor, management, and neutrals.

At Kaiser Permanente, we recognize that our nonprofit health plan was built on the strength of union support.

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