



Who's on our side?

By Graham Trainor Oregon AFL-CIO President

Carrying forward his fight

On the morning of August 5, the nation, the American labor movement, and workers across the globe were rocked by the sudden, unexpected loss of a great man, an incredible leader, and a lifetime fighter for justice, AFL-CIO President Richard Louis Trumka, or “it’s just Rich” as he would so often correct anyone opting for the more formal greeting.

Since his passing, leaders, friends and family of Rich have shared many touching words about him. In just the last two weeks of his life there were examples of his unrelenting advocacy and leadership through several speeches that were not all that unique in the life of someone who spent over 50 years fighting to make life better for working people. But these excerpts do illustrate at least a few lessons about the leader he was and the legacy he leaves.

On July 21, Rich addressed delegates at the Washington State Labor Council convention as the keynote speaker, explaining: “our calling now is to pass the most transformative labor law reform in a generation, that’s the PRO Act ... it will rebalance our economy and strengthen our democracy so that we, the workers, have more power.”

Rich believed in the power and potential

of strong local and state labor movements and showcased that with his investment and support for state federations like ours. While having talented staff and a sophisticated, cutting-edge organization in our nation’s capital is important, he knew that the power of organized labor was rooted in and fostered through a 50-state network to defend and expand our movement in every corner of the country.

On July 27, Rich spoke to the Texas AFL-CIO Convention, sharing that “inequality is the greatest threat to democracy.”

He prioritized building power through organizing and mobilizing in strategic regions, even when they are traditionally more challenging for our movement. From welcoming members of the Texas legislature in Washington D.C. in their recent walkout to defend voting rights to his support of Amazon workers fighting for a better life in Bessemer, Alabama, Rich understood our movement must be organized and energized everywhere.

And on the evening of August 4, he shared recorded remarks with striking miners at one of the largest rallies in Alabama labor history and shouted in his true, bombastic style, “to Warrior Met and all the union-

busters out there: No matter how much you intimidate us, no matter how hard you try to break us, working people are not going to cave or capitulate! We’re not going to give in or give up. We will prevail. One day longer. One day stronger.”

Rich’s fighting spirit was forged in the coal mines of Western Pennsylvania. As the son of a coal miner, Rich followed his dad into the mines while attending college before getting his law degree and becoming a staff lawyer for the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). He could have taken his skills and talents anywhere, but he always saw himself as part of the working class and instead went back to Pennsylvania to fight for the kind of people he grew up with. Rising on a reform ticket to become president of the UMWA at just 33 years old, he led his members on a nine-month strike against Pittston Coal Company.

I first met Rich in 2006, and one of the things that become more and more clear to me as I got to know him was his unflinching belief in and appreciation for the role that the American labor movement must play in broader society, that our work isn’t just about wages, hours, working conditions, and the already-organized. He knew that to have a truly fair, just, and equitable society, workers must have more power in the economy. He used his role, despite the odds and the challenges in an ever-changing economy, to empower every worker.

After the difficult news of his passing, I began watching, rewatching, and reading a number of his speeches that have inspired me at different points in my career. One that I’ve

come back to frequently was the speech he gave at the United Steelworkers convention in 2008, a speech about racism in America and the critically important role our movement must play to tackle it and dismantle it everywhere we see it, a speech and message that is as important today as it’s ever been.

“There’s no evil that’s inflicted more pain and more suffering than racism, and it’s something we in the labor movement have a special responsibility to challenge,” he said in that speech. This was just one of countless speeches or actions where his hatred of any form of bigotry and intolerance, strategies used to divide working people, was obvious.

Rich was a friend of Oregon’s labor movement. He always had our backs. Whether it was blasting dangerous free trade deals to Oregon press or inspiring us to always prioritize organizing and growth at several summits he joined us for, his support for Oregon labor was unwavering.

Our hearts continue to go out to the Trumka family, his friends and colleagues, and the entire AFL-CIO family as we mourn this incalculable loss. But we also know that Rich would not want us to miss a beat and would expect us to carry forward the fight for dignity and respect for every single worker, while also playing a central role in defending our democracy. Passing the PRO Act, protecting and expanding the right to vote, and continuing to challenge and dismantle the barriers that workers of color and women face, I know that’s what we here in Oregon will do to honor his incredible legacy. The fight continues and I am proud to be in it alongside you.



Dan Clay, President Sandy Humphrey, Secretary-Treasurer

Dan and Sandy, along with UFCW local 555’s executive board and staff, would like to wish you a happy and safe Labor Day!

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