

Rest in peace, Brother Rich Trumka



**Fredric V.
Rolando**

The photo on the cover of this month's magazine pays tribute to Rich Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO, who died quite unexpectedly in early August. His death is both heartbreaking and a huge loss for the cause of American workers and the American labor movement. Rich was both a friend and a fierce and loyal champion of letter carriers and the NALC. In all my time as president of this union, Rich was there for me as an ally—and for letter carriers whenever we needed the solidarity of the entire labor movement. We will all miss him dearly.

The cover image captures Trumka at his very best, joyfully fighting for the cause of good union jobs, and more specifically, good union jobs for letter carriers. It was taken in the summer of 2010 at a Rally for Jobs organized by the NALC and the AFL-CIO in front of Los Angeles City Hall. Wearing one of our “5-day is the wrong way” T-shirts, he addressed 10,000 workers from all walks of life, including, most notably, thousands of delegates to the 67th Biennial Convention of the NALC in Anaheim, CA.

At the time, our union was in a desperate fight to preserve Saturday delivery and tens of thousands of postal jobs while the country was suffering the after-effects of the Great Recession. The rally, which stoked public support for our fight to preserve six-day delivery and promoted the L.A. Federation of Labor's campaign to create union jobs through a major program of infrastructure projects, was Rich's brainchild. He came to me weeks before our convention and proposed to hold the rally on the final day of our Anaheim convention. In a matter of days, we reprogrammed our five-day convention into a four-day schedule and added the Friday Rally for Jobs to the agenda. We secured more than 60 buses and union bus drivers and made plans to move more than 3,500 delegates from Anaheim to L.A. for the rally. We were launched that Friday morning with a barn-burning speech from President Trumka in Anaheim to close our national convention.

Thanks, in some measure, to the solidarity displayed by Rich Trumka and the broader labor movement, we won that fight to preserve six-day delivery—proving wrong all the doubters who thought that the Great Recession would destroy the U.S. Postal Service. We not only saved thousands of letter carrier jobs, we

positioned the Postal Service and the city carrier craft to grow with the explosion of e-commerce in the years since.

Rich Trumka was always there when we needed him. In 2017, he helped us launch the National Vote at Home Coalition to fight voter suppression and to advocate for vote-by-mail—which was enthusiastically supported by a convention resolution at the AFL-CIO's quadrennial convention in St. Louis. In 2019 and 2020, when the Postal Service was under sustained attack by the president of the United States, Brother Trumka was there for us again. He invited us to make presentations on postal reform legislation at every one of the AFL-CIO's district meetings in 2020 and strongly defended the Postal Service in countless public settings.

Rich was just 72 years old when he passed away, but many observers thought he was much older given his extraordinarily long career in the labor movement. He worked as a coal miner for seven years and became active in a group called Miners for Democracy, a group that fought corruption in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in the 1970s. This successful reform movement led him to the presidency of the UMWA in 1982 at the tender age of 33. He led the UMWA through a historic democratic transformation and through the strike at Pittston Coal, while rising to prominence as a national leader, eventually becoming secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO in 1995.

Over the past 25 years, Brother Trumka helped transform the AFL-CIO, leading the labor movement to reconsider and modernize its approach to immigration and to reinvigorate its role as a champion for civil rights. He famously confronted the issue of racism in a 2008 speech to the Steelworkers union, when he said: “There's not a single good reason for any worker, especially any union member, to vote against Barack Obama and there's only one really bad reason ... and that's because he's not white.” For a lesson in moral leadership, watch the video of that speech ([youtube.com/watch?v=7QIGJTHdH50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QIGJTHdH50)) and marvel how it foreshadowed his time as the leader of our movement.

It is a source of deep irony and sadness that we lost Brother Trumka at the very moment his life's work appears to be bearing real fruit. The labor movement has almost never been more popular than it is now; the House has passed the PRO Act and pressure is building in the Senate to do the same; and the country has elected Joe Biden, the most openly pro-union president since Harry Truman. Indeed, President Biden's Build Back Better (BBB) program bears the union label that Rich Trumka fought for all his life. The best way for our movement to honor that life is to finish the job on the PRO Act and the BBB program. In death, as in life, Rich can count on the NALC in this effort.

Rest in peace, Brother Trumka.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fredric V. Rolando'.