

CLUW Honors the Legacy of Reverend Jesse Jackson

The Coalition of Labor Union Women mourns the passing of civil, labor and human rights giant, Reverend Jesse Jackson. Rev. Jackson embraced the intersectionality of civil rights across gender and race. He always stood with women, appointed them key roles in his political campaigns, and was a lifelong advocate for equal pay and economic justice for women.

Rev. Jackson had been a consistent and vigorous supporter of the U.S. labor movement and around the world. He walked more picket lines and spoke at more labor rallies than most other national leaders. He worked with unions to organize workers, protect workers' rights, and mediate labor disputes. In 1996, he traveled to Asia to investigate treatment of workers in the Japanese automobile industry and in athletic apparel factories in Indonesia.

Rev. Jackson worked with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and led key organizations in the movement for civil rights, including the Rainbow PUSH Coalition. He also mounted two presidential bids, in 1984 and 1988, becoming the second Black American to run for president as a major political party candidate, following Shirley Chisholm's run in 1972. Through those runs, Jackson helped reshape American political power by building a diverse coalition centered on those long excluded from national leadership — including Black voters, women, young people, and the working class.

Decades before legalized marriage, Jesse Jackson became the first presidential candidate to say “lesbian” and “gay” in his 1984 presidential campaign. “The rainbow includes lesbians and gays,” he said. “No American citizen ought [to] be denied equal protection from the law.”

His support for gay rights continued through the decades, from speaking at the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, to supporting Massachusetts becoming the first state to legalize gay marriage, to speaking in favor of Obama when he came out in support of gay marriage in 2012.

Jackson's coalition building extended beyond Black and white Americans. His first campaign for president was also the first campaign to include an Arab American committee. In 1984, Jackson's representatives pushed the Democratic party's national platform to favor a plank in support of

an independent state for Palestinians. Though that attempt failed, it did not keep Jackson from trying again at the next Democratic party convention in 1988.

He called for “mutual recognition, territorial compromise, and self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians.”¹¹ state parties adopted platforms in support of “the rights of the Palestinian people to safety, self-determination and an independent state”. And, for the first time, the Democratic party debated Palestinian rights at the DNC.

The Coalition of Labor Union Women commits to following on the path for equality, justice and freedom that Rev. Jesse Jackson paved for us.