



Local 1277

News

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President's report

A leader and inspiration

Reverend James Lawson, Jr.: A Man of Faith And an Unshakable Friend of Working People

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277

Over the years, through good times and bad, economic boom and bust, organized labor has been blessed with the strong support of people from all walks of life: Politicians; academics; religious leaders and, of course, the loyalty and strength of countless millions of working men, women, and families.

I am very proud to introduce you to the life, achievements, and lasting legacy of one of Southern California's greatest supporters of working people's needs and goals: **Reverend James Lawson, Jr.** Here is a man whose beliefs, efforts, and life have been devoted to economic, social, political, racial, and *human* equality for everyone.

Reverend Lawson was born in 1928, in Pennsylvania. His father, a Methodist minister, soon moved his family to Massillon, Ohio, where he attended school. In 1947, as a college student, he studied philosophy and met future leaders of the American Civil Rights movement. In 1956, after studying and teaching abroad, Reverend Lawson returned to the United States and resumed his studies at the Oberlin College (Ohio) Graduate School of Theology, where met Dr. Martin Luther King, then a visiting lecturer. Dr. King recruited Reverend Lawson to come south in order to join the new, activist civil rights movement.

For the next nearly two *decades*, Reverend Lawson was an admired, inspirational leader of the southern—and then national—civil rights movement. He left Oberlin to work full time for equal rights and dignity, living in Nashville, Tennessee, so he could continue his studies at the Vanderbilt Divinity School. Preaching nonviolence, Reverend Lawson taught and trained many of the people who would soon become the leaders of the Nashville desegregation movement. He himself took part in commercial sit-ins and other demonstrations.

This led to his expulsion from Vanderbilt for his refusal to discontinue his involvement winning equality for Black Americans.

In 1962, Reverend Lawson completed his degree at Boston University and took the position of Pastor at Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. In following years, he participated in numerous civil rights events, including the heroic and dangerous Freedom Ride bus caravans throughout the deep south. During those years, Reverend Lawson expanded his concerns and efforts to opposing the increasing American involvement in the war in Vietnam.

In the traumatic and violent year of 1968, Reverend Lawson was deeply involved in the strike of 1,300 Black sanitation workers who had walked off the job after two of their colleagues had been killed on the job. This strike, and his strong support for the grievances and rights of the sanitation workers drew national attention. In what turned out to be a tragic result, Reverend Lawson invited his friend, Dr. King, to visit Memphis and speak to the strikers. He did—and on the day after was assassinated there on April 4, 1968.

From the South to the West

In 1974, Reverend Lawson and his family moved to Los Angeles, where he became Pastor at Holman United Methodist Church. He continued his activist career as both a spiritual leader and fighter for economic, social, racial, and political equality. In 1979, after an unarmed mother was killed by LAPD officers, Reverend Lawson and other Black and community leaders led a campaign to demand police accountability through the creation of a Civilian Review Board, which had oversight of incidents of police brutality.

In 1983, Reverend Lawson co-led the “*Jobs not Jails*” march, which called for a holiday honoring Dr. King at both the state and federal level. Thousands of people, including numerous union members and families, took part in this historic event. This march evolved into the “*Jobs with Peace*” movement in the

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mid-1980s, ultimately forming a coalition of union, civil rights, and other area progressive groups that demand a shift in federal spending from the military to community, social, and job-creating priorities.

In 1989, Sister Maria Elena Durazo was elected President of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 11. After strongly supporting her election, Reverend Lawson led nonviolence workshops for union activists as his contribution to reviving and expanding the influence of Local 11. **“Labor rights are civil rights”** became his guiding star, his mission to give working men, women, and families their absolute right to the dignity and good lives they so richly deserved.

Fighting for a “Moral Economy”

In 1991, Reverend Lawson provided training and support to the giant SEIU Local 660’s *“Rolling Thunder”* Campaign at the specific request of the union’s General Manager, Brother Gil Cedillo. The following year, in the aftermath of the shocking Rodney King incident, uprising, and destruction, Reverend Lawson worked with local unions and community groups to stage a march and sit-in at the offices of the “Rebuild L.A.” organization to demand higher wages and better working standards for the jobs created by the much-needed reconstruction of Los Angeles. He led civil-disobedience training sessions before the march and contributed spiritual guidance during the actual sit-in.

In 1996, Los Angeles Businessman-Mayor Richard Riordan threatened to veto a proposed living-wage city ordinance. In response, Reverend Lawson and other pro-working people faith leaders in Los Angeles formed CLUE, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice to push for its passage. In 1999, Reverend Lawson joined legendary labor and civil-rights leaders Dolores Huerta and Jesse Jackson to celebrate HERE Local 11’s organizational victory on the campus of the University of Southern California. Later that year, at the age of 71, Reverend Lawson retired as Pastor of the Holman United Methodist Church.

At the dawn of the new millennium, in 2002, Reverend Lawson began teaching at UCLA. He taught a course entitled *“Nonviolence and Social Movements: Theory and Practice for Social Change”*. In the following year, inspired by the 1960s Freedom Rides, Reverend Lawson, Maria Elena Durazo, and Dolores Huerta led a group of 900 immigrant workers from Los Angeles to New York City on buses. They stopped at

in 100 cities along the way, advocating for greater workplace protections and pathways to citizenship. Their *“Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride”* ended at the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.

In 2006, Reverend Lawson and his CLUE joined Black community leaders to support SEIU’s *“Stand for Security”* campaign to organize mostly Black security officers throughout the city of Los Angeles. In 2011, he participated in the first DREAM Summer Program at the UCLA Labor Center, teaching young immigrant-rights activists the philosophy of nonviolence. In 2013, Reverend Lawson began teaching a graduate seminar at UCLA, *“Nonviolence in Social Movements”*, and in 2016, a book of his teachings—*Nonviolence and Social Movements*—was published.

In 2018, Reverend Lawson was presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor by his long-time friend and civil-rights giant, the late Congressman John Lewis. The following year, he was inducted into the State of California Hall of Fame after being nominated by Governor Gavin Newsom. Just two years ago, in 2020, at the age of 92—Reverend Lawson joined Congressman Lewis, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and California Senator Kamala Harris for a memorial march across the infamous Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, to call for new voting-rights protections. Just a few months later, he delivered the eulogy at Lewis’ funeral.

Last year, Vanderbilt University, where divinity student James Lawson had been expelled for his role in the Nashville sit-ins campaign, established the James Lawson Institute for the Research and Study of Nonviolent Movements. And also in 2021, the California State budget allocated \$15,000,000 to renovate and rededicate the UCLA downtown Labor Center building on MacArthur Park as the UCLA James Lawson, Jr. Worker Justice Center.

What an inspiring life of leadership and achievement! What a life helping the union movement and the working people and families it so strongly represents. A life perhaps best summed up by two quotes from Reverend Lawson:

“Every Worker deserves those benefits that enables them to indeed attain an abundant life that is full of the riches, spiritual, as well as the riches, bread.”

“A society pushing racism, sexism, violence, what I call ‘plantation capitalism’, is a society that desperately needs transformation—social, economic, political, and spiritual change and revolution. No matter our lofty documents, the majority of people in the U.S. did not and do not have full civil rights.”

Life's relay race

Attention: Inland Empire Members

I.E. Labor Council Endorsements For April and June Elections

As always, the Inland Empire Labor Council has taken the time and effort to interview candidates for various federal, state, and local political offices. The Council questions and then deliberates about candidates, focusing on their commitment to the needs and goals of working people and families. These endorsements are the results of their work, and are recommended as the best men and women for their positions.

April 12 election

Moreno Valley City Council – **Elena Baca-Santa Cruz**

June 7 elections

U.S. Congressional District 23 – Derek Marshall

**U.S. Congressional District 25 – Raul Ruiz
(incumbent) – No recommendation**

U.S. Congressional District 33 – Pete Aguilar (incumbent)

**U.S. Congressional District 39 – Mark Takano
(incumbent)**

U.S. Congressional District 41 – Will Rollins

**California Assembly District 36 – Eduardo Garcia
(incumbent)**

California Assembly District 45 – James Ramos
(incumbent)

California Assembly District 47 – Christy Holstege
California Assembly District 50 – Eloise Gomez Reyes
(incumbent)

**California Assembly District 53 – Freddie Rodriguez
(incumbent)**

California Assembly District 58 – Sabrina Cervantes
(incumbent)

**California Assembly District 60 – Corey Jackson or
Esther Portillo – No recommendation**

California Assembly District 63 – Fauzia Rizvi

Riverside Board of Education (2) – Eric Mooney
Riverside Board of Education (6) – Elizabeth Romero
(incumbent)

**Riverside County Superintendent of Schools – Edwin
Gomez (incumbent)**

Riverside Bd. Of Supervisors (5) – Yxstian Gutierrez

Riverside County District Attorney – Burke Strunsky
Riverside Superior Court Judge (11) – Laura Gracia

San Bernardino Bd. Of Supervisors (2) - DeJonae Shaw
San Bernardino Bd. Of Supervisors (4) – Connie Leyva
**San Bernardino City Council (4) - Christian
Shaughnessy**

San Bernardino Mayor – Helen Tran

**San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools –
Catherine Wind-Muro – No endorsement**

Our Union Responsibility

By Errol Frazier - Vice President, Local 1277

For more than 30 years, I have been a proud member of ATU Local 1277. I take great pride in both my membership and in my support and activities within our union. *But please know, brothers and sisters, that my love for my union didn't just happen. It wasn't "just one of those things."* It took me time and patience—on my part and that of more-senior members—for me to learn and fully understand what important lessons that were being taught to me.

Think of a union life as a relay race, passing the baton from hand to hand as runners race around a set course. When it is *our* turn, so to speak, in a union, when we are called, our job is to receive and secure that baton—and *then be damn sure to get it to the next runner (or generation of union members).*

I have very vivid memories of the many kind, patient, and more experienced brothers and sisters who took me under their wing to protect me and help me grow up. Oh, sure, they “showed me the ropes” when it came to the ins and outs of my work—what to do, what *not* to do—and all the time doing the job safely and efficiently.

I warmly salute those veterans and their lessons: *Arthur Winston; James Gatewood; David Chamness; Michael Medina; Alvie Jones; Rudy Campos; Billie Rains, and Richard Frandan* and all the others who took the time to speak to me, counsel me, or even give me a brotherly smack on the back of the head just as a friendly reminder not to forget a work or *life* lesson they had passed on down to me.

These are the people—my teammates—who started me off on the first leg of this life-long, rewarding relay race!

Learning and Growing

What did I learn? Oh, not much. *Just everything!* My more-senior members—my relay racers—taught me on the spot, about whatever issue was hot at the time and I had questions about: Getting to work on time; attendance; work assignments; vacations; benefits; grievances *and, above all, union representation.* And those were just *some* of the things they taught me; their lessons covered anything else they thought it was important for me to learn. These kind, patient, and experienced members knew they had an

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important duty: To raise and teach the next generation of union members. Believe me, they took great pride in doing their part—*passing on knowledge and experience; passing on the baton, so to speak.*

We active members have secured that baton, but we must be prepared to pass it on. Sharing the knowledge and raising the next generation of strong union members falls directly on the shoulders of every Local 1277 brother and sister who can consider themselves veterans with more than 10 years of membership and service.

It is up to us to share the history/career lessons with our younger brothers and sisters. We all can remember our first few days and weeks, even months, on the job at any of our properties. We all can remember the anxiety that came with our new jobs and responsibilities and questions that seemed to pop up all the time. Those first few years in any job are the most challenging—and that is certainly true for us at every one of our properties. *So, let's not forget our duty to pass on that baton, that collective knowledge and experience, to our next generation.*

Let me say to our newer brothers and sisters: ***We got you!*** It hasn't been all that long since we were in the same position you are now in: New and learning. All of us are here to help, to share our knowledge and experience to make your career and tomorrow the best they can be. *We're here to pass that baton.*

Always know that we will gladly give you all that we have learned and give you the time you need to digest and understand what we teach. We will give freely of our experience—in a spirit of union fellowship—and all we ask is that you *receive* our input freely, soak it up, and use it wisely and productively. Never forget, we all have that duty to those who follow us.

Pass that baton!



Know your rights as a union member!

Your Weingarten Rights are a Hard Fought Benefit for Working Men and Women

By Jeff Shaffer - Financial-Recording Secretary

There may come a time at work when you may be told by a supervisor or a manager that they would like to speak to you, either in their office or, for example, in a drivers lounge. For a maintenance employee, a proposed meeting may be out at a shop or in the field. A supervisor or manager may want to speak

to you about anything; it could be something minor, or it could just as easily be about something more.

If this situation arises, you should *not* ever feel scared, nervous or intimidated. There is always communication between supervisors and managers, and employees, during a work shift. You may be asked how things are going, or if you need help, or simply if you have any questions concerning anything to do with your work.

*But there is one very important thing to remember if the conversation ever starts to go in a direction (or towards a topic) which may cause you to feel that the talk is heading to a point where you may be facing any kind of disciplinary action: **This is exactly the moment when you invoke your Weingarten rights.***

Under your vital Weingarten Rights, you, as a union member, have *the absolute right to say, "If this discussion can in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated for cause, and have any effect on my personal working conditions, I respectfully ask for assistance from my Shop Steward."*

Never, ever forget this! If you feel that a supervisor's or manager's questions could lead in *any* way to *any* kind of discipline, or worse, you should stop answering questions immediately and ask for your Steward. This is your *undeniable* right as a union member.

Don't let a manager or supervisor fool you or "lull you to sleep" with softball questions. Management may well tell you that it is just asking some simple questions on a particular matter. Maybe. Maybe not. But why take a chance? *If you have any slightest doubt about anything that has been asked of you, just stop the conversation right there and say that you would like to have your Shop Steward with you.*

Never mind if a manager or supervisor tells you that don't need your Shop Steward because we just want to get some information. Don't listen to them. *Further—and this is very important: If you have asked for your Shop Steward to be present at this point, and you are denied this request, you simply say, Without proper and rightful representation present, I choose not to continue this discussion.*

This is a *fundamental* right of yours as a union member. It is a hard-fought, valuable right that you have. Know your Weingarten Rights, and always be ready to use them if you have to. If you have any doubts, simply clip out this article and carry with you on the job.