

Richard L. Trumka, AFL-CIO President



[Click photo to enlarge and download.](#)

On September 16, 2009, Richard L. Trumka was elected President of the AFL-CIO by acclamation at the Federation's 26th convention in Pittsburgh, Pa. His election, following 15 years of service as the AFL-CIO's Secretary Treasurer, capped Trumka's rise to leadership of the nation's largest labor federation from humble beginnings in the small coal mining communities of southwest Pennsylvania.

Twelve-year-old Richard Louis Trumka was sitting on the porch of his grandfather Attilio Bertugli's house in Rices Landing, Pa., complaining bitterly to his grandpap about how badly Mine Workers were being treated. It was the 1960s, and the miners were on strike.

"What do you plan to do about it?" his grandfather asked.

"When I grow up, I could be a politician," Rich replied. His grandpap feigned smacking him across the back of his head. Chastened, young Trumka offered a second opinion: "I could become a lawyer and stand up for workers' rights."

His grandfather, a long-time miner, allowed how that was a better idea, but added something that has stuck with Trumka ever since. "If you want to help workers," his grandfather said, "you first need to help people."

Rich Trumka not only grasped the wisdom of his grandfather's counsel, it has been the encompassing vision of his leadership in the labor movement ever since: Unions must strive to uplift everybody in their pursuit of fair treatment for workers, as they did in building the world's strongest middle class, and as they must once again by leveling the playing field and restoring job growth and prosperity for working people.