CBTU FAREWELL TO A WARRIOR FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Vernon Watkins, who became a legend in the California labor movement and a behind-the-scene force within CBTU from its inception, was eulogized and laid to rest Monday, March 16, following his homegoing service, which drew an overflow crowd that included CBTU President Emeritus William Lucy and numerous CBTU and AFSCME members. He was 76. His wisdom, humor and gritty Detroit swagger will always remain present.

Speakers pinpointed highlights of Vernon's amazing career that began in the late 1950s with the Graphic Arts International Union and then took off when he became an organizer for AFSCME in the late 60's. He was a trailblazer who played a key role in the fight for pay equity for nearly 4,000 low-wage Los Angeles city workers, most of them women.

As AFSCME's statewide director in California, Vernon led an unprecedented campaign to organize University of California employees in the 1980s. Cheryl Parisi, executive director of District Council 36, said, "Vernon built the union in this state. He was involved in virtually every large element of our growth and organizing."

But as tenacious as Vernon R. Watkins was about protecting the rights of working people and fighting for social justice, he enjoyed nurturing folks to achieve goals that they might believe beyond their resources or background. His motto: "Simple, find a way."

He capped his career by becoming Bill Lucy's executive assistant in the Office of the AFSCME International Secretary-Treasurer. He succeeded the late Leonard Ball and served from 1992 to 2010, when he retired and returned to his home in the Los Angeles area.

Mr. Lucy said of his dear friend of many decades, "A Vernon Watkins does not come this way often. He had my back and was always in the thick the action -- building CBTU, making AFSCME a powerhouse in California,, helping South African trade unionists win freedom. He and his beloved wife, Marion, and his children were so very, very close to me and my family. Our hearts will always ache for their loss, but they can be certain that the Watkins family and the Lucy family will always be bound by unwavering love and mutual support."

Cards and or condolences may be sent to his family:

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