

ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY OCTOBER 16



Dr. Leon Sullivan and Senator Jennings Randolph, June 23, 1976 (Jennings Randolph Collection)

Prominent civil rights leader Dr. Leon Sullivan was born in Charleston on October 16, 1922.

CSO: SS.8.25, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (*Charleston Gazette* April 26, 2001)

1. What was the apartheid system that Leon Sullivan was credited with helping bring down?
2. What was the purpose of Leon Sullivan's 1960s Philadelphia-led protest?

Think Critically: What is racial segregation? What did racial segregation look like in the United States and when was it in effect? What are the similarities and differences between the Jim Crow laws in the United States and Apartheid in South Africa?

the Charleston
Gazette

LEÓN SULLIVAN: 1922-2001



The Rev. Leon Sullivan returned to Charleston in August 2000 when city leaders named a downtown street in his honor. He graduated from all-black Garnet High School in 1939. Editorial, 4A

Anti-apartheid champion dies at 78

By Bob Schwarz
bobschwarz@wvgazette.com

The Rev. Leon Sullivan, the West Virginia native who helped bring down the apartheid system of racial separation in South Africa, died Tuesday night of leukemia at a Scottsdale, Ariz., hospital. He was 78.

"He was one of West Virginia's great, great citizens," said Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., who said he had many opportunities to work with Sullivan.

"He was an extraordinary leader of people. He was also an extraordinarily kind, thoughtful presence with a lot of humor, powerful yet deeply humane and wonderful to be with," Rockefeller said. "It's terrible that we've lost him."

Born in Montgomery, Sullivan was raised in Charleston, where he graduated from all-black Garnet High School in 1939.

In 1930, when he was 8 years old and living in Charleston's East End, Sullivan ventured

The Sullivan Principles

The Associated Press

The Rev. Leon Sullivan started writing his Sullivan Principles in 1975. The principles were "a code that companies of America and the world came to follow to end apartheid peacefully, starting with the workplace," he said in a 1998 interview. The principles were adopted in 1977 by 12 American businesses.

- The basic Sullivan Principles are:
- ▲ Nonsegregation of the races in all eating, comfort and work facilities.
 - ▲ Equal and fair employment practices for all employees.
 - ▲ Initiation of and development of training programs that will prepare, in substantial numbers, blacks and other nonwhites for supervisory, administrative, clerical and technical jobs.
 - ▲ Increasing the number of blacks and other nonwhites in management and supervisory positions.
 - ▲ Improving the quality of employees' lives outside such areas as housing, transportation, schooling, recreation and health facilities.

across the street to buy a soft drink. He put a nickel on the counter, sat down and announced he wanted a Coke.

"I can still see him today,"

Sullivan recalled nearly 70 years later, referring to the reaction of the white store owner. "His eyes were blazing, his face got red. He said, 'Get on your feet,

black boy! You can't sit down here."

That was his first confrontation with segregation, and the small boy lost. "So I decided that I was going to stand up against that kind of thing the rest of my life."

In the early 1960s, while pastoring a large church in Philadelphia, he organized a boycott of Philadelphia businesses that did not hire blacks. "Don't buy where you don't work" was the slogan.

The boycott worked, and jobs became available to blacks who had the skills. Many did not.

"In order to fulfill my protest, I had to create programs for progress. So out of it came OIC — Opportunities Industrialization Center," Sullivan said.

The first OIC opened in Philadelphia in 1965. A year later, the second opened in Charleston with help from the Rev. Paul Gilmer, who had gone to school with Sullivan at Garnet.

"It was the salvation of this

Please see **SULLIVAN, 11A**

April 26, 2001

The State Newspaper — Our 129th Year

the Charleston Gazette

SULLIVAN

Continued from 1A

country," Gilmer said. "We had complete turmoil in our big cities, and he kept these youths off the streets. OIC came at the right time with his philosophy of self-help. It helped a lot of people and impacted a lot of people right here in Charleston."

By 1998, an Associated Press story said about 1.5 million people of all races had been trained in 142 centers worldwide.

In 1971, General Motors tapped Sullivan as its first African-American board member. If General Motors was hoping for a yes-sir, no-sir kind of guy, they picked the wrong man.

"He wasn't that kind of person," recalled the Rev. Homer Davis, president of the Charleston branch of the NAACP. "He had a strong vision about benefiting humankind, especially minorities, and he had a unique vantage point on the board of General Motors."

In 1977, Sullivan wrote *The Sullivan Principles*, taking the seemingly quixotic line that American companies operating in South Africa should run non-segregated factories and give equal pay and equal opportunity to people of all races.

"Leon Sullivan was a giant," Davis said. "Humankind is the better because this man used the gifts and talents that were God-given to him to foster and further the interests of people everywhere."

Sullivan described the principles as "a code that companies of America and the world came to follow to end apartheid peacefully, starting with the workplace."

In the 1980s, he came to believe that U.S. companies could better pressure South Africa by pulling out of the country entirely. General Motors and 11 other major U.S. companies withdrew, and in time the apartheid system crumbled.

"If you take a hammer and a chisel and pound a rock 100 times, it's going to crack. I pounded and pounded, and it cracked," Sullivan recalled.



The Rev. Leon Sullivan grew up in this small house in Charleston's East End.

In 1999, Sullivan and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced an updated version of *The Sullivan Principles* to encourage fair employment around the world.

"Rev. Sullivan showed us all how much one individual can do," Annan said in a statement Wednesday.

At the time of his death, Sullivan had been preparing to discuss African political, economic, educational and social development at a summit conference for American and African leaders in Nigeria.

He had conducted a similar conference in 1993, calling it "a good opportunity to send a message to the world about Africa. I'm talking about 500 million people that the world hardly recognizes as even being there."

Sullivan's parents divorced when he was 3, and he grew up an only child. At 6 feet 5 inches tall, he played center on the Garnet basketball team.

He went to West Virginia State College on a basketball scholarship. As a junior, his life changed

when he suffered an injury, lost his scholarship and decided to become a minister.

"I knew there was a purpose early on," he said later. "I would write poetry about the advancement of blacks and that sort of thing."

He earned money working days at South Charleston's Naval Ordnance Plant and attended classes at night at West Virginia State College. After graduating in 1943, he went to New York, where he studied under Adam Clayton Powell in Harlem. On a blind date in Harlem, he met his wife, whom he always called Amazing Grace.

Seven years later, he moved to Philadelphia to become pastor at Zion Baptist Church, which grew under his leadership from 600 members to 6,000.

In 1965, Charleston's Sunday *Gazette-Mail* named him West Virginian of the Year. In 1999, he returned to deliver Charleston's annual W.E. "Ned" Chilton III Leadership Lecture, named for the newspaper's late publisher.

Gazette President Elizabeth Chilton commented Wednesday: "I feel privileged, and my life was enriched, to have known a man of such character and integrity. He really stood up for what is right."

Two other Gazette officials, business manager Norman Shumate III and director Susan Chilton Shumate, donated funds for a school Sullivan's organization is building in Africa.

In August 2000, Sullivan came to Charleston when city leaders changed the name of Broad Street, near his boyhood home, to Leon Sullivan Way.

"He was one of those guys who was bigger than life and a very humble individual," Charleston Mayor Jay Goldman told *The Associated Press*.

"In West Virginia, we have never given him the credit for what he's done worldwide," Goldman said. "I'm just happy we were able to honor him while he was alive and he was able to appreciate it."

Gov. Bob Wise ordered U.S. and West Virginia flags flown at half-staff through Saturday on all state buildings.

"He's done as much to advance the cause of civil rights and basic humanities as any single person," Wise said. "He showed the way, not only for West Virginians, but for the world. He made his mark in civil rights, human rights, economics and social rights."

The Rev. Ron English, of Charleston, called Sullivan "a gentle giant of a man who ascended from humble origins in Charleston to fashion a movement that improved the plight of the least of the lost and the left-out."

Sullivan is survived by his wife, Grace, son, Howard, daughters, Julie and Hope, and seven grandchildren.

Funeral services are scheduled for 11 a.m. PDT Tuesday at First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix, followed by burial at Serenity Chapel in Greenwood Memory Lawn in Phoenix. Public viewings are scheduled for Monday evening and Tuesday morning.

To contact staff writer Bob Schwarz, use e-mail or call 348-1249.