

Hulan Jack, civil rights hero, dies

by Dennis Speed

Former Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack, who became the first black American to be elected to major public office since Reconstruction, died on Dec. 19 after a lengthy and serious illness. He was a leader of the civil rights movement and a fighter for universal freedom.

Hulan E. Jack was born on the Caribbean Island of St. Lucia, West Indies, on Dec. 29, 1905. His father, a minister and an activist in the Marcus Garvey movement, brought Jack to New York City in August 1923. He found immediate employment, enrolled in the New York Evening High School, graduated, and later attended college at New York University in the evenings.

Early experiences with racial discrimination failed to deter Jack from his commitment to excel. He joined the Democratic Party in 1930, and became a U.S. citizen in 1931. Despite active racial harassment, he became an essential worker for the Democrats, who made significant headway among the New York City black population with the 1932 election of FDR. Jack became the Democratic Party candidate for state assembly (14th A.D.) in 1940, and was elected. In 1946, he became a district leader of the party, a post he held until 1972.

During his first period in the state assembly, Hulan Jack collaborated with Congressman Adam Clayton Powell in preparing simultaneous national and state legislation, opposing the proliferation of marijuana and hard-drug traffic. Unfortunately, Jack's colleagues failed to act on his and Powell's proposal. The legacy of that inaction is clear in New York City and the United States today.

After serving in the assembly for 13 years, Jack was elected Manhattan Borough President in 1954, at that time the third most powerful elected office in the United States in scope of responsibility. Significant improvements occurred in the infrastructure of the city of New York during Jack's tenure in office.

When he refused to surrender the administrative powers of the office of the borough president, to that of the mayor, at the request of the "good government" reform movement, Jack was forced out of office through a manufactured scandal. His fights with the corrupt real estate and banking interests, on behalf of Manhattan's population, rendered it essential to those interests that Jack be removed.

He took a voluntary leave of absence in January 1960,

prior to a political show-trial. The prosecution was unable to convince the jury of Jack's guilt, and after a half-dozen deliberations, each ending in a "hung" jury, a mistrial was declared. A second trial was secured by the district attorney's office. In that trial, Jack was convicted without additional facts, largely by the weight of influence of the testimony of the infamous New York City Commissioner Robert Moses.

Jack continued in his capacity as district leader and was reelected to the New York State Assembly in 1968. His seniority was considered continuous based on his previous service, and he was immediately given responsible positions on several committees. The threat of Jack's reemergence as a significant political force—including the possibility that he might wage a successful New York mayoral campaign—was averted, through a second manufactured scandal, resulting in his defeat as both district leader and state assemblyman in 1972.

Jack was imprisoned for three months in 1973. In his autobiography, *50 Years a Democrat*, Jack states that his wife played an essential supportive role for him during these dark days. Jack then operated in a condition of "semi-retirement" which was equivalent to intensive activity for a man half his age. He acted as an adviser to innumerable politicians and others, who owe the start of their careers to him. In 1979, Jack, then assisting in the reelection effort of Jimmy Carter, was visited by members of the campaign organization of Lyndon H. LaRouche. A series of discussions ensued over the November-February period, and Mr. Jack visited LaRouche at the latter's campaign residence in 1980.

A three-and-a-half-hour discussion was always afterward recalled by Mr. Jack as the source of his subsequent conviction that LaRouche "was the man for our time." Jack officially endorsed LaRouche for President in August 1980 in a televised address.

In August 1980, Jack became an advisory board member of the National Democratic Policy Committee upon its inception. LaRouche, in a tribute to Hulan Jack, recalled: "He was for us, 'Mr. Democrat,' whose advice usually prevailed during discussions of policy among NDPC leaders." Hulan Jack was the moving force for the Committee for a New Africa Policy of 1980-81. Jack spent approximately a year visiting African delegations at the U.N. and in Washington, D.C., to organize for advanced technological and agricultural programs for Africa.

Jack became a founder and an executive board member of the Schiller Institute in 1984, journeying to Europe for the first time in his life to defend the ideals and principles of the Western Alliance. In 1985, he was a participant in the Schiller Institute conference on St. Augustine held in Rome, Italy.

Through nearly six decades of public service, Hulan Jack, a devout Catholic, remained a man dedicated to his family, and the Christian ideal of a strong family life. Hulan Jack is survived by his wife, Almira, his son, Edwin, his daughter, Julienne, and five grandchildren.