

CARTON 8:20

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

MANUSCRIPT DRAFTS, CHAPTER 11

1999

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CHAPTER ELEVEN: Struggles in San Francisco (ver 1, 7/11/99)

(Sources: Statement in Local 110 & Jack Tar folders; 5/31/94 and 7/19/94, 7/15/99, 7/23/99 interviews; arbitration hearing 6/2/69, 9/21/95, 10/27/95 interviews)

While working at the Fairmont I became aware of some of the working conditions, which was very poor. It was similar to a non-union house. Personally I felt compelled to attempt to straighten up some of the discrepancies and conditions at the hotel.

I noticed that it was mainly Afro-American women working as housekeepers cleaning the rooms. They was often mistreated and abused and discharged off the job, with no follow up to reinstate them from their union, Local 283 of the room cleaners union. I raised that question at a meeting of the Joint Board of the hotel workers' unions. One of the representatives, Charlie Gricus, got angry with me, telling me, "You don't have anything to do with it." I said, "I'm a member of the union and I'm going to speak out when I see anyone abused." So I took up the fight for the room cleaners. I was concerned about them and I wasn't afraid to speak up. I had knowledge of being a shop steward from working down South, and I was able to give support with the experience and knowledge that I had to struggle for better working conditions on the job.

As a result of my opinions and oppositions that I submitted to my superiors, the hotel representatives began to harass and make trouble for me. They made false accusations against me, said I was drinking on the job. Consequently I was discharged from my job in

1967, but the real reason was because of my union activities and my efforts to rectify the working conditions.

After being discharged I went to Sam Daniel, the business agent of Local 110. I explained the situation and he went to talk with representatives of the Fairmont hotel to question my dismissal. I was not present at the confrontation between Daniel and the Fairmont. The problem wasn't solved at the meeting, and after the meeting I asked Daniels to file action with the Adjustment Board, made up of representatives from the unions and the employers. But my request to be reinstated was denied. I felt that Daniel was more or less collaborating with the hotel; he was very close to the bosses.

During the time I was working at the Fairmont Hotel I met and got married to Moselle Mayfield. Moselle belonged to the union, too, but I didn't meet her on the job. She was working at the Holiday Inn. I met her on Third Street at her former husband's place. Her husband had married again. He had a cafe close to the shipyard where he sold barbecue. She was there one day with a lady friend, who was roommates with her, and we got to talking. Moselle was active in a church on Newhall Street. She tried to get me to donate to the church but I wasn't too interested in that. After a while we decided to get married, but her roommate, whose name was Candy, decided to stay there with us in the house on LaSalle Street. Now I didn't like that too much. I didn't like the way when we was shopping in the supermarket Moselle would ask Candy what she wanted before she ask me what I wanted. Sam Daniels used to come around and visit and said he didn't think it was right for Candy to be living there and causing conflict. So he come and talked to Candy. But Moselle got

angry and said, "If Candy going, I'm going." "Well," I said, "there's the door, sister. Get to stepping."

So we didn't get along too well, and we decided to get divorced after two or three years.

Around the time I was discharged from the Fairmont they had just opened up the Jack Tar hotel on Cathedral Hill. I knew the kitchen steward, an old fellow in his 70s by the name of Mr. Smith. He was a nice fellow, brown-skinned fellow. Him and I talked. I asked, "Do you have any work you can give me?" He said, "Where you worked?" I told him I came from the Fairmont and what had happened. He was an understanding man. We was Masonic brothers. He said, "Brother Brown, I can put you to work around here cleaning walls until something opens up and you can get a regular job." That's how I started at the Jack Tar.

I got a regular job first washing dishes and then as a night porter. The working conditions at the Jack Tar was equally as bad, and I began to voice my opposition against conditions. I organized a group of the night porters. We had a racially mixed crew, including some Spanish people, working there, and they said, "We want you to be shop steward." They had never had a shop steward on the job, but it was in the contract. Nobody had the experience or the guts to be shop steward. I said, "I accept," and they elected me shop steward on January 16, 1968.

The porters and the bar boys and vegetable cleaners was being overworked and I spoke up about it. The chef didn't like what I was doing, and that's when they made me assistant steward to Mr. Mitchell, figured I would sell the men out. Mr. Mitchell was the

Jack Tan. He was really with the hotel department
executive steward of the ~~Fairmont~~. He was over the store department.

He was also in the union. On Sunday when Mitchell went to church, I took his place on the job, helping to ~~get the food dishes~~ *get the food dishes* ~~dish food up.~~ *to the work*

One time when we had a union meeting of the men in the store department the chef and the personnel manager showed up. I said, "Y'all can't come in here. This is a union meeting." They said they had come to meetings before. I guess Mitchell used to let them come in but I wouldn't. They saw that I was shop steward and we had rules and they got mad. I also told all the brothers to wear their union buttons to let them know we was organized.

Once again I was told to mind my own business or else I would be dismissed. Mitchell told me that the kitchen chef and the manager, plus others, wanted me fired. This was because of my union activities. But they couldn't directly fire me for my union work, and they couldn't fire me for incompetence, so they accused me of being drunk on the job and they discharged me on January 26, 1969. They wanted me off the job, I was too hot. They never had a militant person that'd speak out, particularly for the Afro-American room cleaners. I wouldn't let them get away with abusing and discharging the room cleaners with no follow up. Never had nobody that would stand up and tell them that they was doing wrong. The black room cleaners was not getting meals. All the rest of them, even the doormen, the bar boys, got meals. They was after me, and they also wanted to get rid of all shop stewards in hotels, which they hadn't had before I come along even though it was in the contract.

My case went to an arbitration hearing on June 2, 1969. Mitchell was one those that testified against me, to save his job.

When they had the hearing he was sitting up there crying. He really hated to do it, but he did. He got caught in a trap. He said I had to relieve him on a Sunday while he went to church. He claimed that he come back and I was drunk, said he smelled alcohol on my breath. What happened was that Mitchell wanted to fire this brother named Jefferson because he said he was drunk. I told Mitchell he didn't have the right to fire Jefferson. Mitchell say, "I'm going to fire you too, I'm going to fire both of you." That's how it started. Then at the hearing Mitchell said I was drunk, too. That was a front to keep from saying they was discharging me for my union activities as shop steward. I told I hadn't had nothing to drink. They wasn't bringing me anything I didn't know. I knew all about their tricknology. I give them all hell up there, told them that I was discharged because I had made complaints about the conditions. I gave them a list of the demands I had raised: Stop mistreatment and unfair discharges of maids, free meal tickets for maids in all hotels, organize hotel and restaurant workers throughout the nation into unions, and end all discrimination against black people in the hotel and restaurant industries.

The room cleaners went on strike in the Fall of 1969 and since I was out of work the business agent of Local 110 called me down to Commercial Street to be picket captain. I was picket captain for three years. I worked for the four locals -- Local 44, the cooks, Local 48, the waitresses, Local 30, the waiters, and Local 110, my local. The room cleaners Local 283 was on strike over working conditions, and the other locals supported them by sending pickets.

My job was to sign the picket slips. They was supposed to picket for four hours, then I sign the slip. I had my little book with the names and make them sign. Each week I worked for a different local. Each local paid me to be picket captain, and the one that paid me the most was local 30.

The whole three years we didn't have no fights, no arguments, no drinking on the picket line. I knew how to handle it.

The room cleaners finally won the strike after three years. One of the bosses who was at Harpoon Louie's diner on Commercial Street came out at noon one day and told me, "We're folding up. You got us." I said, "What you mean?" He said, "We're gonna sign the contract." He shook hands with me, and I told the rest of the pickets that we had won a victory.

I got a job with the Western Addition Black Security Guards. The Black Security Guards had been set up by the African Descendant Nationalist Independence Partition Party, which I was a member. I had got involved with the ADNIP party during the time I was angry with the Communist Party because of racism in the party. I read Wilson Record's book, The Negro in the Communist Party. I felt that the Party leadership, not all leadership but the national leadership, was not carrying out the program to fight racism and discrimination. The Party wasn't fighting to build a left center in the trade union movement. The Party should have been more effective against these right-wing unions and racist union leadership. The Party was not helping the grassroots, only serving the intellectuals. I didn't feel like the Party was serving the interests of the masses, of the black workers.

The ADNIP party had an office on the corner of Fulton and Fillmore in the Western Addition. I joined them because I liked their program of building up the economic program of black people, and I figured that was one of the solutions to the problem. I don't think that black people should separate, but I think we should have our own community with our own stores, hotels and whatever.

When I was working at the Fairmont, I had tried to start a business of my own, "Brown's Foot ^{Formula} ~~Product~~." The idea had come up in New Orleans when I was staying at Mrs. Poplar's. She had trouble with her feet. She had come up with a formula to help soothe her feet. Years ago I heard from her adopted daughter, Levoya, that Mrs. Poplar got run over in a car wreck and she never recovered and she passed. After I got out to California I worked on the formula which she had told me. Me and another fellow named Buddy McNeil, he worked at the Fairmont and helped me. It would help if you had bad feet, aching feet, corns, athlete's foot. You put it on and rub it in and it would soothe your feet. A pharmacist named Mr. Reid helped us get it past the Food and Drug Administration. We took it to a company to put it on the market. It cost us a thousand dollars apiece. But I made a big mistake because I didn't get a lawyer to follow up on it, and I didn't keep a copy of the formula. Somebody probably got it out there on the market now under a different name. I learned from that to never to do nothing in business without somebody to represent you, and keep copies of everything. It cost me a thousand dollars to learn that.

Al Sultan Shabazz was head of the ADNIP party, which was founded in 1962. I met him at a community meeting when I was working

at the Jack Tar. He was from New Orleans and had been in the Army. He was very intelligent and well informed. He read a lot and he wanted to teach ancient African history. We discussed black nationalism and Africa and how we should have something in our community. I believe they did that in the Soviet Union, had different communities. I believe we would be better off if we would have a community, something we could identify with, that would give us the right to teach our history. I don't believe that in these schools, in the educational institutions, that we are getting our complete history, particularly our ancient history. We talked about racism and white supremacy and how we wasn't getting a fair shake. So I got interested. I knew a little bit of my history and I knew we was a long way from getting a fair deal. People in church say "Forgive them, for they know not what they're doing." I say any time a sonofabitch mistreating people, he know he doing wrong.

The ADNIP party said they wanted separation, two separate republics, one for blacks and one for whites. They had a list of nineteen states they wanted. They had set up a Provisional Government with Al Sultan as Prime Minister. I was more interested in the trade union movement and struggling to get the unions to deal with racism. I told Al Sultan I was in the union, so he appointed me Minister of Labor. I wrote articles for their newspaper and gave speeches at meetings.

The ADNIP party had different businesses. They had a moving business and the black security guards. Al Sultan Shabazz had contracts for security guards at a building on Geary Street and in the Martin Luther King housing projects and other places. He had

about twenty people working as security guards. Not all of them was members of the party. I was put in charge of the guards. I was the supervisor. I had to check on them. I would go around to the guards at night, check to see if they was on their posts. If they have problems they would come to me. If they had a problem on the job or wasn't doing the job, I could suspend them, or give them a few days off, but I had to know both sides. We also had families that would come over to the office with their problems. People didn't want to take their problems to the police. Black people have enough intelligence to solve their own problems, but they need help. I know I worked with about three or four families that come there. We helped solve their problems, and they got back together.

We tried to stop people from being violent, 'cause that wouldn't solve the problem. We talked to people. I learned that from my Grandfather. I remember him saying, "When you get into violence, you ain't gonna solve the problem. You gonna make it worse." He taught me that if you get in an argument, before it gets violent, say, "Let's have a recess, let's table this and cool off." Then you come back and solve the problem. We was building the black community, showing what black folks can do. We advocated for the community and tried to clean up the community. The police didn't give us no trouble. Chief Cahill said, "I don't have nothing against the Black Security Guards. Everywhere my police go, they see them."

We had general membership meetings and served dinners. We passed out flyers in the community. We had education meetings. One time we sponsored a meeting to commemorate the birthday of Marcus Garvey. The black guards had their own newsletter.

I was in the ADNIP party four or five years, until it broke up. Al Sultan left the country and went to Guyana. There was a stool pigeon in the party and Al Sultan was accused of hiding some guns somewhere. I never did see anything like that. He didn't want to go to court so he left the country. I never did see him no more. I heard that he wrote two books and opened up a bookstore over there. Then I heard he was going to come back to the United States but he was assassinated. I think the snitch was working for the CIA. After that the ADNIP party just fell apart. Those years I worked for the Black Security Guards was the last job I had before retiring.

While I was working at the Jack Tar Dr. Mitchell at UC told me I had to stop working in the kitchen, that the heat was too much and I was getting high blood pressure. I took some high blood pressure pills for a while, and later I got partial disability.

From the time I first arrived San Francisco I was meeting people and going to meetings and getting involved. When I first come here somebody told me to go see Dr. Carton Goodlett for help in finding a job. He had an office on Fillmore between Sutter and Bush. Dr. Goodlett was also the publisher of the San Francisco Sun-Reporter, a black community newspaper. He gave me twenty-five dollars to help me. I saw him again at the Cow Palace at a big civil rights rally where Martin Luther King was speaking. There was thousands of people there and I was sitting way in the back. Dr. Goodlett was there passing out copies of his newspaper, and we talked for a while. A few years later while I was working at the Fairmont hotel I met Dr. Goodlett again. I was at a meeting on Van

Ness Street and I run up on him. They had a lunch break at the meeting he said, "Brown let's go get some buffalo meat." I was surprised. I said, "Doctor, don't be pulling my leg." I never heard of nobody eating buffalo meat. We come on up to Tommy's Joint^Y at Geary and Van Ness. We sat upstairs and he ordered buffalo stew. I ordered the same thing. It was good. We talked about different things and got to know each other. After that I used to go by his office sometimes and talk.

In 1966 Dr. Goodlett decided to run for Governor. He asked me to support his campaign. I said I would and he gave me a letter authorizing me to collect funds for his campaign. I used to go around to meetings to talk about his campaign, raise funds, shake the bushes, talk to people one on one. I didn't do no hell of a lot but I helped out because I thought he was a good man, very progressive. (WHAT WAS GOODLETT'S PROGRAM? WHO WON ELECTION?)

Him and I stayed friends. I used to go to his office to talk about issues. When I got my medications from the Kaiser health clinic I would take them to him to look at, tell me if they was any good.

I was sorry when Dr. Goodlett passed in 1997.
~~Dr. Goodlett passed in 1998 (GET DATE)~~

I also was involved with the Auto Row protest that happened in (YEAR?). Van Ness Street was where all the car dealers was located and they decided to protests against the racism of the car dealers. I marched down there with Dr. Bourbon (SP?) who organized the demonstrations. They wanted the dealers to hire black salesmen to work there on Auto Row. I think they got two, three jobs for some black salesmen. That wasn't a grassroots issue, it was about

upgrading the professionals. Just like when we used to fight for better parts in the motion picture industry

Another time we picketed the hotel there on Market Street, the Sheraton Palace, to try to get them to hire more black workers. Like all them damn hotels, it was very racist about hiring black folks. I remember one night a busload of Africans pulled up while we was picketing. We started talking. They wanted to know what we was doing. We asked them not to go in there, and they didn't. We did get the hotels to hire more black people and improve conditions for the room cleaners, but only a few people went down there to the union to apply for the jobs. I don't know why more people didn't go for those jobs.

In 1968 I worked with the Peace and Freedom Party in Eldridge Cleaver's presidential campaign. Kathleen Cleaver asked me to work on the campaign. Kathleen had heard about me from a girl named Tracy Sims. We used to march in demonstrations down at City Hall. One time we marched down there when Cahill was chief of police. This was when Sam Jordan was running for Mayor. Sam was a retired longshoreman who had a bar on Third Street, and he was very active in the community. I spoke at the rally. Chief Cahill had brought out police dogs to scare the people. I said, "Turn those dogs loose! Goddamit, we'll eat 'em up!" I'd've probably been the first one to run, but it worked. I scared the Chief and he didn't let those dogs loose. Maybe Tracy told Kathleen about that.

Kathleen and I had a long conversation. She wanted me to join the Peace and Freedom Party and help them out. (PROGRAM OF P&F??) So I went around talking to people, handing out literature.

I also worked some with the Black Panther Party chapter in San Francisco. I met some of the members, a guy they called "D.C." and some others. They was a young group and I used to give them advice on handling security. This was when I was working with the Black Security Guards. We used to meet upstairs at the Panther office on O'Farrell Street. Some of them act like big shots in the community. But I remember one time the Panthers from Oakland came and took their money. Showed they was just selling wolf tickets.

I worked with the Panthers until they broke up. I was there when Betty Shabazz came to San Francisco. I was in charge of her security. I told the security guards how to search people, pat 'em and check for weapons. I was her personal body guard.

So I was involved with the Communist Party, the ADNIP Party, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Black Panther Party, and sometimes the Muslims and some other groups. I kept up my membership in the NAACP and went to their meetings on Divisadero Street. I was busy in those days, man. That was my trouble, I was trying to do too much. It was crazy. On Sundays I would leave one meeting and go to another. And I didn't stop when I retired. I worked more, with the NAACP and with the Senior Action Network and housing groups. That's how come I started to have high blood pressure and heart problems. I'm lucky not to be dead.

Through it all I was working to get freedom. I wanted people to be free. I thought it would come through socialism. I thought socialism was coming right away. We still need socialism, but we also got to have strong unions, low income housing, health care for

the people, social security, day care centers, rest homes for the old people. We need all of this.

What disappointed me about the Communist Party was that the leadership didn't follow through on the struggle against racism, white chauvinism. I think there was some truth in that book by Wilson Record. The Party was mainly using intellectuals and didn't go to the grassroots in the trade union movement. The intellectuals and professionals mess up the Party and they divided the people. To me the Party members in the South was more dedicated, and there was more trade unionists in the Party. What we need is a strong party and a left-wing movement in the unions. The biggest mistake they made was when they didn't build the left wing of the unions, move the unions to the left-center. That's why I liked V.I. Lenin and William Foster: build the unions. That's the key. That's where the masses at.

The other organizations I worked with over the years, I wanted to get in there and bring up issues. Raise issues and let the people know what's going on. A good left-wing trade unionist will get in there and bring issues to the floor, like I used to do in the NAACP and the other mass organizations. Be a spark plug, and at least some of the people will go along with you.

BROWN'S FOOT FORMULA

CONTAINS

Isopropyl Alcohol-20%; Ammonia -4.4%;
Mineral Oil-3.2%.

25

DIRECTIONS FOR USE

Wash feet, dry with vigorous motion, using heavy towel. Apply Brown's FOOT FORMULA generously, massage and allow to dry. Feel the quick, soothing relief to your tired aching feet. Prevent Corns, Calluses and Bunions.

NET CONTENTS: 8 FLUID OUNCES

For External Use Only

SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING

BROWN & ASSOCIATES

CAUTION

If you have diabetes, impaired circulation of feet, or if you are inflamed, consult your physician. **PRECAUTIONS** - Keep away from fire. Keep all medication out of reach of children.

CAUTION
In case of allergic reaction such as broken skin, discontinue use. Avoid with eyes.

Lee Brown Chronology in SF

- ✓ Works at Fairmont Hotel, elected shop steward (date?)
- ✓ Meets Moselle Mayfield -- their relationship -- break up
when met, married, how work, why broken up, divorced
- Leaves Fairmont (why? what happened?)
- ✓ Goes to Jack Tarr Hotel -- elected shop steward -- problems at Jack Tarr
- ✓ Meets Grace Oliver -- when? what was she doing, their relationship, marriage, together for ten years (1976-86) -- fire at their house -- her death, cause
- ✓ Involvement with Ad Nip party (see interview notes, 9/21/95)
- ✓ Involvement with Black Panthers, Angela Davis
- ✓ Peace & Freedom Party, Carlton Goodlett campaign
- ✓ "Bown's Foot Product" -- story of
- ✓ Work with senior citizens since retirement

Articles/letters written to newspapers

*Strike 1969
picket captain
7/13/94
Clear
Woburn Y 84*

NACCP

*1966
Carlton Goodlett
Campaign
Auto New
Struggle*