

Carton 9:14 THE BROTHERHOOD of SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Dellums, C.L. Oral History Chronology

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CL Dellums Oral History Chronology

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- CL Dellums was born Jan. 3, 1900 in Corsicana Texas.
- In 1923 Dellums arrived in San Francisco and considered it the "ideal place for a Negro to live." University of California's Law school was a big part of the draw. The Bay Area was an unusual choice for black migration, Los Angeles was a much more popular destination. (3)
- Shortly thereafter, exact date not given, Dellums settled in Oakland at 11th and Wood, and was unable to find work to support himself while attending law school. Later he went to work for the Pacific Steamship as a "room steward" for several months. (5)
- In January 1924 Dellums was hired as a porter by the Pullman Company. He made contacts at the Southern Pacific Station.
- Shortly thereafter, Dellums met Lee Williams, the Pullman instructor for new porters. Williams recruited Dellums into the Northern California Branch NAACP for the first time, but he did not become really active until after he was fired by the Pullman Company. While working full time for the Brotherhood Dellums was in town frequently and could work much more actively with the NAACP. Dellums notes that the union the civil rights organization faced similar problems – people very reluctant to join. (45)
- January 1926, Dellums met A. Philip Randolph for the first time at the Parks Chapel Church in West Oakland at Ninth and Campbell.
- Later that month, Randolph gave a speech in Oakland. (17)
- Together they began organizing the union. (*Exact date not given – check secondary sources*). CL quickly became known as the informal leader. Major company targets were Dellums in Oakland and Ashley L. Totten in Kansas City. (11)
- In 1928 the Pullman Company took major retaliation measures against the Brotherhood. They fired forty-five men and suspended forty five others. They transferred work from Oakland to Chicago to cover the labor shortage on the West Coast. The Pullman Company also worked very hard to infiltrate the union. (15)
- A. Philip Randolph was fired by Pullman in this period. (*Note clear from Dellums' account whether it is before or after mass firings.*) (18)
- In or around July 1928 Randolph began working full-time for the union. (Date uncertain from Dellums' account.)

- Dellums was accused of embezzlement in the union's bonding practices. Randolph gave him the power to audit the books. According to Dellums this incident was related to company spies. After successful resolution, Dellums' pay in the union was raised from twenty dollars a week to twenty-five dollars a week. (19)

-In 1928 the Brotherhood passed a strike vote against the Pullman Company. No win situation because the union was broke and the National Board of Mediation failed to declare an emergency in accordance with the Railway Labor Act. The union was left in lurch, because they couldn't win at that point against Pullman. They needed a way out. Randolph and William Green of AF of L got together. They worked out an agreement that was the beginning of the Brotherhood's affiliation with the national trade union. BSCP agreed not to cancel but to postpone the strike. After these meetings, the AFL accepted 13 local charters and affiliated a select number of unions, not all. They, however, did not operate like normal federal locals. (26-27)

- In September 1929 the first Brotherhood Convention was held in south Chicago. None of the delegates that attended the meeting were current porters. The Pullman Company wouldn't recognize the union's existence, and if porters attended they were immediately fired. Nearly all of the delegates were porters who had been fired for union activity. The convention represented Dellums' first attempt at national/international organizing. At this meeting Brotherhood vice presidents were also elected for the first time. This was a source of some controversy. Milton Webster was elected first VP (in terms of rank), Dellums fourth. According to Dellums, although rank was supposed to be meaningless, it was, nevertheless, a source of discord. They met and elected Roy Lancaster Secretary Treasurer for the first time. He was a controversial character – some accused him of graft. (21)

-The following year, 1930, the Brotherhood held their convention in St. Louis. Dellums remembered it as "even smaller than the one in 1929." The union was suffering financial difficulties and was forced to eliminate some VP positions and the Secretary Treasurer. They had also lost a number of men and didn't have the money to replace them. (23)

(Somewhere between late Sept 1929 and Sept 1930 – unclear from text.)

-During the Depression years, the Brotherhood was extremely strapped for cash. They held several fund-raising events with help of Lancaster and his Tammany Hall connections. The first was a baseball game with two Negro teams in Yankee stadium. Portions of proceeds went to the union. The second event pitted Bo Jangles against Joey Ray who was "called the fastest man alive." Dellums said that actually Bill Robinson was the world greatest black runner – running backwards. To start off the race, organizers gave Ray a 50 yard handicap in a 100 yard race. Although the exact outcome unclear in oral history, Dellums implies that Ray still won. It seems almost as if Dellums doesn't want to mention that directly. (23-24) The third event staged was a midnight benefit for Brotherhood in Harlem theatre, reputedly with help of Tammany Hall. Juicy story – see account p.24. *(Although exact dates are not mentioned, from Dellums account*

seems as if these events took place in 1929 and 1930, prior to the St. Louis convention.)
Final event in particular was a source of controversy at the convention. (24)

-The West Coast BSCP sponsored its own small events to support the "regional set up." They held several dances a year. They used a segregated (all white) hall, Sweet's Ballroom, the most popular club in Oakland at the time. Dellums persuaded the owner with his usual tact and charm. (24-25)

-In 1929 the Brotherhood joined the AF of L. For many previous years, Randolph had made speeches on the floor of the Union protesting the color bar. They received increasing coverage by the press. "Year after year the debate came more intense and Randolph's speech... was run in the major newspapers around the world. Foreign correspondents began to cover it and wait for it." (26) *(Get Dates and check the Press. Find out how long Randolph had been making those speeches.)*

-Dellums doesn't give date, but mentions that the Brotherhood was accused on the floor of the AF of L of organizing an all black union. Dellums explained that they did not have a choice because of the segregated nature of the workforce. (25) *(Would be interesting to get these proceedings? Where are these AF of L records?)*

- Dellums explains how the Brotherhood changed the union movement: "The Brotherhood became a part of the labor movement and advocated that Negroes join the labor unions and encouraged them to join. Many of them thought they couldn't join unions [sic] that they could join and didn't try because of the general belief that the AF of L discriminated against Negroes." (26)

-It was an on going struggle to desegregate individual unions, for example Culinary Workers International Union or the machinists union, rather than the AF of L itself. Dellums felt strongly about this and likened individual unions to Baptist churches serving their own congregation. National authority had little power over the local; therefore, the focus should be on individual unions. Relatively little of this work was done on the West Coast, machinists were the exception. (28-29)

-Dellums supported the 1934 waterfront strike by participating in meetings to raise morale and maintain the strike and pickets. This was not without danger. A car of teamsters and longshoremen parked outside his house for protection. (69)

-Dellums lent support to the longshoremen in other ways. In 1934, it came to his attention that strike breakers were holding a quiet meeting on 7th St. in Oakland. Longshoremen had asked Dellums to intervene. He went to the meeting with only two bodyguards, worked his way up to the front and "gave them... a good educational talk on labor and civil rights where we had so much in common." His effect was magical, and the strikebreakers agreed to cease and desist and filed out of the meeting. Upon leaving the meeting, Dellums and his body guards saw a number of whites milling about in cars. They were longshoremen and their supporters who had come to lend him extra

protection. (From the tone of the story, it shows clearly how Dellums deep affection for his white union brethren was always tinged with an element of surprise.) (70)

-In 1936 Dellums was elected to the Executive and Arbitration Board in Alameda County's Central Labor Council. Dellums became a delegate to the Central Labor Council after the union received its AF of L charter. This promotion developed Dellums reputation as labor leader. (30)

- In 1936 the Progressive caucus within the Central Labor Council decided to leave Dellums off the slate. He became embroiled in a conflict with the Communists. Quote from Dellums describes his confrontation with them: "Let me tell you damn Commies something, every damn one of you, I'm more progressive than most of you Commies ever will bet. [sic] You don't want me on your ticket because you can't control me." (31)

-Shortly thereafter (1937?). CIO - AF of L split took place and the Central Labor Council had its charter taken away. All of the "so-called militants" got dumped, including Dellums. After that he never held office on the Council again. He only served as a delegate. Dellums did, however, go on to serve on the Alameda Country Labor Political Committee for many years. (32)

-In 1937 the Pullman Company signed its first agreement with the Brotherhood. The agreement took two years working with a federal mediator. Its accomplishments: most importantly the agreement "established the Pullman porter as a human being and a worker" that both the company and the public were bound to respect, regulated hours for the first time, and provided for a nominal pay increase. (25, 30)

-On August 25, 1937 Pullman finally agrees to recognize the BSCP after ten years of struggle. "They weren't at all happy.... That is why I use the expression, we showed them where to sign." (30-33)

-During the 1936 - 1937 strike lockout in the Bay Area, Dellums supported Harry Bridges in the East Bay. (68-70)

-Dellums participated in the campaign to free Tom Mooney. They successfully lobbied Governor Olson to free Tom Mooney in 1939. Dellums helped stage a welcome home celebration for Mooney in the Oakland auditorium, and served as the master of ceremonies. He had been popularly chosen, and the significance was not lost on him. "Some things are done now because we are Negroes. Damn few things were done then because we were Negroes. They were done in spite of us being Negroes!" (33)

-During the Depression Dellums was also active in the low-cost housing movement in Oakland. He worked through Labor's Non-Partisan League to lobby the city council for an enabling resolution to receive federal support for permanent low-cost housing. Dellums worked with other progressive organizations, including the Oakland League of Women Voters. (*Might use secondary sources or newspapers to get more exact dates.*) (35)

-Dellums got involved in the fight for establishing Campbell Village, which pitted him against an indifferent real estate company. The first phase of the battle consisted of getting the realtors to make more accurate appraisals of homes in West Oakland. The consistently low valuation of homes made owners very resistant to selling, and many people were forced to give up their property with little compensation. Dellums became involved in the negotiations and tried to get homeowners as much money as possible. (37)

-The second phase of the fight for public housing entailed the decision-making process for selecting tenants. Dellums worked together with a black realtor, William P. Butler, to make sure that tenants were "checkerboard" in order to create true integration in the public housing units. The result was a remarkable spirit of unity and cooperation among tenants that led to Campbell Village becoming a national model for integrated public housing. (37)

-Several years later Peralta Village was built. Dellums contrasted this housing development with Campbell. In Peralta they "integrated segregation" – one building Negro and the next white, etc, etc. Dellums used this as an example of what happens when people demobilize after a victory. Without constant vigilance and political organizing, gains are easily lost. "From integration to integrated segregation to lily-whitism." (37) (*Get exact date: Late thirties, early forties?*)

-Dellums later participated in local programs of the National Youth Administration (NYA). He helped open a residence center in Asilomar for children with workshops. While Dellums recognized the need for segregated branches of the NYA in the South, he opposed Bethune's establishment of southern-style Negro sections in the Bay Area. Dellums passed word of his opposition to Senator Downey who spoke with Mary Bethune in D.C... She sent her assistant Dr. Ohara Lenier out to investigate. Dellums met with Lenier, and they proceeded to wine and dine him. Ultimately, he helped craft Lenier's report and recommendations. Thanks to Dellums' actions, Negro sections were eliminated, and several people lost their jobs. This incident showed Dellums' adamance about keeping segregated institutions out of California. (41)
(*Exact date uncertain, NYA started in 1935*)

-Dellums was later appointed to serve on the State Advisory Committee after the head of the NYA ordered that California branch be restructured. (42)

-War-time 1941

Dellums on the East Bay Draft Board for two years. When Dellums served Warren had just become governor. (*Figure out date.*) (43)

-Dellums served on Legal Redress Committee dealt with various types of discrimination complaints. Started out by compiling a list of unions that discriminated with color clauses in their constitutions. (*Date unclear*)

-1941 was the beginning of battles with the shipyards and other war-time discrimination cases. There were on-going battles with the Oakland Key System, firehouses, and other public employers. Dellums gives a detailed account his successful strategy for opening up shipyards and Key System. Dellums lobbied with his comrade Milton Webster to get blacks employed by the unions and owners, and helped organize community preparation for entrance exams. (50-55)

-In 1945 the NAACP chapters were reorganized. During this year Region One was established which included seven western states, including Hawaii and Alaska. This later became Dellums' region. Noah Griffin was the origin regional secretary, and he was then succeeded by Franklin Williams in 1952. In later years the NAACP was broken down into area conferences. According to Dellums, this had serious ramifications for the organization. (60)

-In 1946 Dellums opposed the initiative for a California FEPC introduced by Gus Hawkins. Dellums objected to the initiative primarily because he thought that people should not have the right to vote on others' rights to live or make a living. "I was quoted saying that it was like wanting me to arbitrate my right to breathe. Nobody would arbitrate his right to breathe nor should they vote on my rights." Also said thought it was futile, and would loose at that time, ultimately setting them back. (58)

-Dellums goes on to make a very important statement about the power of rights. "One, because we should never set a precedent that we recognize that the people have a right to vote on anything they want to vote on. The rights I have been fighting for all my life, they are now called civil rights, God given rights. White people have been using their majority and their control of the law enforcing agencies and firearms to prevent us from exercising our God given rights." (58)

-In 1950 Dellums served as president of the Alameda County Branch of the NAACP. He opened the hearings on police brutality in Oakland with a speech. Dellums notes that he made a much longer statement than was reported in the press. The hearings lasted for three days. Dellums closed the proceedings after grabbing the loudspeaker just as they were about to adjourn to say that he hoped that "something would come out of them." Shortly thereafter, Oakland police chief signed agreement for Dr. Dave McIntyre of U.C. to instruct police in "human relations." (*Would be good to get these press clippings.*) (56)

-In 1951 the NAACP pitched in to help pass the 1951 FEPC bill. Tarea Hall Pittman organized a mobilization in Sacramento and issued a statement in the name of the regional chairman of the NAACP - C. L. Dellums. The NAACP considered the meeting a success, because all the branches of the California NAACP were represented. However, the leadership realized a more permanent statewide organization was needed in order to get a fair employment law on the books.

-In 1952 Dellums met with a number of civil rights activists (many Jewish and/or from labor), including Earl Raab. Leaders were chosen and an informal organization was set up. They later issues a state-wide call to organization to send representatives to meet at Earl Rabb's headquarters. This activity culminated in the first state-wide meeting in Fresno which officially launched the movement for FEPC. The organizing committee was called the Cal Fair Employment Practices Committee. (60-61)

-In 1953 (*Dellums is uncertain about the exact date*) the FEPC bill was introduced into the State Senate and immediately voted down unanimously. Dellums did not see this entirely as a defeat. Because the Senate had been forced to take a stand, the battle lines became more clearly drawn. The committed targeted Senator Abshire, who went on record as opposing the bill. Using their political muscle, the organizers were able to get him voted out of office. This gave them greater political leverage in the long run. (60-62)

-Dellums describes the organizing effort that took place between 1953 and 1959 that made passage of the FEPC bill possible. The Cal Committee sponsored a serious of mobilization that became ever larger through the course of the decade. Influential individuals' like Dr. and Mrs. Clark Kerr became important resources. Mailings to politicians were created using their names in order to link FEPC with recognizable supporters. The majority of the Committee support came from labor. (62-65)

-Throughout this period Dellums financial sustenance came from the BSCP. All of the FEPC work was entirely voluntary. (65)

-Dellums became vice-chairman of the fair employment practices committee in 1964, after he was appointed by the governor. He contrasted the resources of California's FEPC with other states (New York, Michigan and other "civilized states) unfavorably. "My position has been and still is that is the most important commission in this state and has always been treated like the stepchild of state agencies." (66-67)

-Governor Brown reappointed Dellums to the Commission in 1965 for a term expiring in 1969. (68)

-In 1968 A. Philip Randolph stepped down, and nominated Dellums as his successor. He was unanimously elected. In 1971, Randolph again nominated Dellums with the same outcome. (68)