

Carton 10:23 THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Theses Regarding Development
& Significance of BSCP

2006

2017/93

C.L. Dellums, The Brotherhood, and Fight for Racial Justice

THESES REGARDING DEVELOPMENT & SIGNIFICANCE OF BCSP

R. Allen 11/25/06

FIRST SUCCESSFUL, NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN LABOR UNION

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union (BSCP) was the first successful effort to organize a national labor union of black workers. It was the first (and only?) black union to successfully confront a major U.S. corporation (Pullman) and win the right of collective bargaining, as a result gaining major improvements in wages and working conditions for porters. Further the BSCP was the first (chk?) independent African American union admitted, albeit in a second-class status, into the American Federation of Labor. Over a span of more than half a century the BSCP was the largest, longest lived, and most influential African American labor union in U.S. history.

NEW MILITANT LEADERSHIP

Discuss importance of women/wives in union building + leadership
black

C.L. Dellums and the BSCP organizers forged a new secular leadership comprised of middle class activist intellectuals and working class intellectual activists who were independent of the black church, economically self-sustaining economically independently sustained (in part by BSCP), and open to radical ideas and militant, confrontational organizing. This leadership developed a strategic plan of engagement on two fronts: (1) The BSCP led a determined struggle from within against racial discrimination in the AFL; (2) as a matter of principle the BSCP leadership was committed not only to labor organizing but also established the BSCP as an independent base from which to build a general movement for racial justice. The leadership actively sought to infuse a more militant attitude and mass-based practice in the civil rights movement.

Reference argument in RR book BSCP in dialectic of power & class

Position on side of BSCP

12/6
[Boxed text]

Check James Boggs writings on UNIONS (white) to contextualize BSCP
RR power activists as children of working class movements
Negro WRM in Detroit
Write intro essay on Theme + then appendix autobio

NEW JOBS, NEW COMMUNITIES, NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

The confrontation in 1941 between A. Philip Randolph, national leader of the BSCP, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt over Randolph's planned March on Washington was of historic consequence, precipitating a sea change in American life. The initial outcome was Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 8802 ordering the ending of racial discrimination in defense industries and the federal government. A temporary Fair Employment Practices Committee was also set up to oversee compliance. (Jervis Anderson, 255-61) These actions set in motion unplanned major social transformations, including (1) the opening up of tens of thousands of defense and government jobs to black workers; (2) large-scale migration of black workers in search of jobs from the rural areas and towns of the South to growing urban communities in the South and North, and especially to the West Coast where defense industries and shipyards spawned new black communities in Oakland, San Francisco, Vallejo, Richmond, Los Angeles, etc., dramatically changing the racial composition of urban California and the nation; (3) a new spirit of militancy and resistance to discrimination was awakened in black communities, expressed in 1942 in the famous "Double V" campaign and in 1943 in rebellions against racism in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York. The new spirit grew stronger in 1948 when Randolph mounted a successful campaign to pressure President Harry Truman to issue an executive order banning discrimination and segregation in the military. This new militant spirit among black Americans along with demographic changes and growth of new communities created a new political consciousness and social base for the militant civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and the later emergence of radical groups like the Black Panther Party.

Use internal colonialism
theory

DIALECTICS OF SEGREGATION. . . .

The BSCP provides of powerful example of a dialectical process by which racial segregation produces the conditions for its own destruction. By concentrating black people in separate, cohesive communities (and jobs) segregation facilitates the emergence of independent racially-based organizations capable of successfully opposing racial segregation and discrimination. This process was seen in southern cities such as ^{colonial} Montgomery, where segregated black communities mobilized their collective social and economic power to wrest concessions from the white elites.

. . . AND SELF-DETERMINATION

X The BSCP constituted a significant site for the construction and exercise of self-determination. Born of necessity, this self-organized site enabled other possibilities to develop. To begin with, organizing the union could not have happened without a leadership that was independent of and not susceptible to manipulation or removal by the Pullman Co. Previous organizing efforts by porters were foiled by firing the organizers. Secondly, as the BSCP grew and was able to depend on members' support and dues to sustain the organization, the space for self-determination was extended beyond the union. Having an independent base the leadership was able to work with a wide range of civil rights and other groups to organize anti-discrimination campaigns. Through the union the "humble" Pullman porters, often stereotyped as Uncle Toms, created a powerful oppositional site supporting challenges to segregation and discrimination throughout U.S. society. Because he was leader of the Brotherhood Randolph could believably confront Roosevelt with the threat - and potential reality -- of a massive, possibly disruptive, black march on Washington. Because he was local organizer of the Brotherhood E.D. Nixon

was positioned to play a critical role in organizing an effective bus boycott campaign in Montgomery. Because he built a strong regional Brotherhood organization C.L. Dellums could become NAACP West Coast regional chairman and chief organizer of a long and ultimately successful campaign for a Fair Employment Practice law in California. Ironically, black porters, who in the 1920s feared for the loss of their jobs, were the foundation of an organization that in subsequent decades provided critical leadership in mobilizing powerful interventions for jobs, fair treatment, and full civil rights for all citizens, regardless of race.

F EPC
BPP
CL & Spence in activism, consciousness building

Develop lots of all scholarly work
on KSCP