

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Pullman porters used politics, organizing to build a stronger middle class



On a muggy day in August 1925, a disgruntled group of 500 Pullman train sleeping car porters in Harlem banded together to fight segregation and improve working conditions by forming America's first African-American labor union.

From the beginning, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was more than just a labor union that fought for better wages and benefits for its members. Led by A. Philip Randolph, they wanted to change America by uplifting all African-Americans. Their motto: "Fight or be slaves."



A. Philip Randolph

"A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess," Randolph said.

The porters worked on the Pullman train sleeper cars at a time when railroads were America's major form of cross-country transportation.

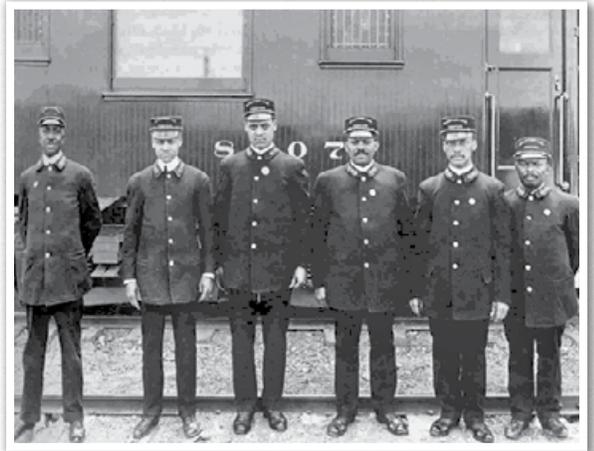
They carried luggage, made the beds, tidied the cars, served food and drink, shined shoes, and were available night and day to wait on the passengers. They often worked 20-hour days and depended on tips to support their families. Their steady jobs allowed their members to buy homes and enter the middle class, which was rare for African-Americans at that time.

Organizing the community

The porters became leaders and organizers. They took their organizing experience from the union hall into the churches and the community to fight for civil rights and voter registration. They also worked to build coalitions with unions and other progressive groups to fight for a more inclusive society.

The porters helped win broader public support for African-American civil rights in the 1930s and '40s. In the 1950s, porters organized many early civil rights campaigns, including the Montgomery bus boycott.

"Their ability to build strategic alliances with the broader community is a political strategy that remains relevant in 2012," said Local 1000 President Yvonne R. Walker. "Today, we follow in their footsteps. Building our union is what builds our power."



Turning political power into worker rights

Dills Act makes our contract possible

The rights and guarantees we enjoy as state workers today were made possible with the passage of the Ralph C. Dills Act—a law allowing public sector employees in California to collectively bargain the terms of their employment.

After two decades of political efforts, lobbying and organizing by state workers who wanted the same collective bargaining rights as the private sector, Gov. Jerry Brown signed the Dills Act into law in 1977.

"The tireless political efforts of state workers made the Dills Act—and our contract—possible," Local 1000 President Yvonne R. Walker said.

Many of the benefits we enjoy today—including vacations, pensions and medical benefits—came only after bargaining between the state and its employees. One often-overlooked provision of the Dills Act: those hard-earned rights are guaranteed to us and cannot be taken away or modified without collective bargaining—or a change in state law.

In the decades since passage of the Dills Act, critics of organized labor have threatened to repeal the law in order to weaken the rights of public employee unions.

Member action pays off in CHP dress code win



Barbara Pantoja

Organized workers succeed in changing workplace rules on athletic shoes

A persistent campaign by Local 1000 members over the appropriateness of athletic shoes has led to a dress code change for hundreds of civilian members at California Highway Patrol headquarters in Sacramento.

"It was an arbitrary rule, and we refused to let management get away with it," said Jim Holverstott, an IT programmer analyst at the CHP and a longtime steward. "The department tried to institute a stricter dress code for employees who have no contact with the public. We fought it. We didn't give up and, finally, we reached a fair compromise."

After more than a year of campaigning, the CHP implemented a new dress code policy in January that adopts compromise language put forth by Local 1000 members.

Casual Friday, formal week

The dispute dates back to 2010 when the CHP first issued a memo spelling out dress code rules for a "casual Friday" for executive staff

"The issue is fairness in the workplace ... we showed that through the union we have a voice."

—Barbara Pantoja, California Highway Patrol

and other non-uniformed CHP officials who work with the public. The same memo also noted no employee could wear athletic shoes and jeans from Monday through Thursday.

"They backed into a stricter dress code," said Barbara Pantoja, a 13-year CHP employee and one of the leaders in the campaign. "For those of us who do not have contact with the public, this was a new restriction."

Holverstott, Pantoja and fellow steward Lupe Lopez led members in the fight on several fronts. Local 1000 was able to delay implementation of the dress code last year after filing a successful unfair labor practice charge with the Public Employment Relations

Board (PERB) that pointed out that CHP had failed to meet with the union before changing the dress code.

A petition signed by 140 members opposing the dress code change also offered alternative language that would allow athletic shoes but maintain professional standards. In January, CHP issued a memo that adopted Local 1000's language word for word.

"The issue wasn't really about what kind of shoes you wear on what day of the week. The issue is fairness in the workplace," Pantoja said. "A lot of CHP employees signed on because they know the dress code was unfair. We showed that through the union we have a voice at work."

Resource Center

Monday-Friday
7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
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GENERAL COUNCIL DELEGATE DEADLINE

Nomination forms due by Feb. 24 at Local 1000 HQ

If you are interested in serving as a delegate at the Local 1000 /CSEA General Council in 2012, your completed nomination packet must be received by Feb. 24 at Local 1000 headquarters in Sacramento.

To find out if a District Labor Council (DLC) has a delegate vacancy, go to seiu1000.org and click the "Delegate Election" button. There you can also download a nomination form. The form and

a candidate statement of up to 100 words must be received at Local 1000 headquarters (1808 14th Street, Sacramento, CA 95811) by 5 p.m. on Feb. 24. Nomination material may be emailed to Local1000elections@seiu1000.org or faxed to **916.554.1282** or delivered or mailed.

The vacancy election timeline can also be viewed on the delegate election page at seiu1000.org