

Lee Brown

“Lee Brown is a bear of a man, a gentile giant with an imposing presence, a ready smile, a gravelly voice, and, most importantly, an unwavering focus and an unwavering commitment to justice.” Julianne Malveaux.

Lee Brown was born on May 28, 1921, in New Orleans. From the very beginning, his young life was filled with tragedy. When he was only three his father dies in a work-related accident and his mother became mentally disturbed so he was sent to live with his grandfather. Not long after, however, his grandfather also passed away and Lee was passed from home to home until, at age fifteen, he left home to find work and support himself.

At age seventeen Lee Brown joined his first common laborers’ union while working on the dry docks in Galveston, Texas. There he had his first taste of labor struggle when the union called a strike in 1939 for better wages. From this point on he began his active fight for justice. For the rest of his life, Brown fought as a progressive trade unionist for decent wages, decent working conditions, seniority rights, pensions, welfare funds, better schools, and better health institutions in the communities.

Throughout his career as a labor activist, Brown gave numerous speeches and wrote many articles including his thoughts on issues such as world peace. “I am speaking of the colored people of the world, who are crying for peace. And I urge every delegate when he goes back to his union to fight for peace in his community, in his state, in his city, in his church, in his lodge....”

Even after Brown retired, he remained active in the trade union movement, and began his fight for black seniors. In the People’s World Magazine on May 19, 1984, Brown wrote, “As a Black Trade Unionist, I call for an end to the discrimination against Black seniors on a national level. This means all those in senior organizations, retiree groups...etc. – minority and white senior elders – should fight for equity of all seniors.” Lee Brown was a powerful advocate for change who never gave up fighting to help those who were oppressed and in need of help. “For Lee Brown, life and struggle for change are one and the same. As he put in, ‘I have dedicated my life to the service of poor people.’” Robert L. Allen