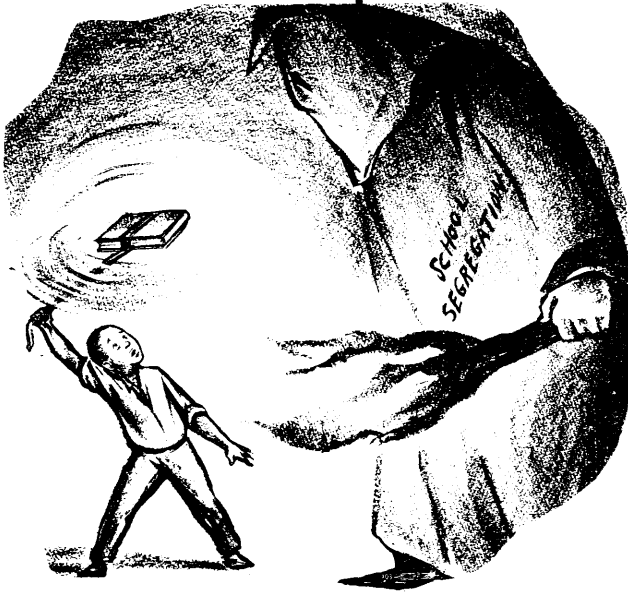


Desegregation!



*Labor's
Stake
in the
Fight*

for

Negro Equality

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by Jean Simon

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THE NEGRO STRUGGLE

plus news stories and analyses of the Negro fight against Jim Crow
in industry, the armed forces and everywhere else

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Labor's Stake in the Fight for NEGRO Equality

A big fight over segregation is shaping up in this country, and everyone in the United States is going to have to take sides. To do so intelligently, rather than emotionally, it is important to understand the issues involved.

The Negro struggle for equality broke into the front pages of the daily press and became national and international news around the Supreme Court cases to determine whether segregation of colored children in public schools is legal in the United States.

On May 17, 1954, the highest court of the land ruled that public school segregation is unconstitutional since "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and persons so segregated are "deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."

That was a great legal victory for democratic principle. It was a victory because it threw out the policy the Supreme Court had followed since 1896 that segregation on a racial basis was constitutional as long as the separate facilities were "equal."

But the Court did not say *when* and *how* its new rule should go into effect. The Attorney General of the United States and the attorneys of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and of the states maintaining segregated schools were invited to present their views to the court in further hearings.

A year later, on May 31, the Supreme Court finally issued its second decision. It reaffirmed the principle that "discrimination in public education is unconstitutional," but left it to the local school boards which practice segregation to determine how and when those separate schools should be abolished. Moreover, the District Courts, which have ruled against integration, are to judge whether or not the local boards are carrying out desegregation in "good faith."

This was a political victory for reaction. As the New York Times correspondent from Tennessee reported on June 1: "In off-the-record

statements state officials here were inclined to view the decree as being about as lenient toward the South as the Supreme Court could have been without reversing the opinion handed down in May 1954."

Political leaders in Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia are understandably contemptuous of the ruling which assumes their "good faith" although they had already taken steps, in advance of the May 31 decision, to evade any order to integrate the schools, and had publicly announced their intention of maintaining segregation at all cost.

Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina passed amendments to their state constitutions permitting the abolition of the public school system to preserve segregation. Florida passed a bill giving local school authorities the power to assign students to schools. Alabama's Attorney General asked the legislature for funds to hire four additional attorneys "primarily to handle the multiplicity of segregation suits..."

The lower courts have already indicated the kind of decisions that may be expected from these guardians of "good faith" in implementation of the Supreme Court's ruling.

In Columbia, S. C., on July 15 a three-judge Federal Court, utilizing the double-talk language provided in the Supreme Court's ruling, ordered Summerton school district trustees to proceed "with all deliberate speed" to operate on a non-segregated basis "from and after such time as they may have made the necessary arrangements."

When Charleston Attorney Robert McC. Figg said the trustees would be in constant danger of being cited for contempt if the decree were "no clearer" on the amount of time allowed, Judge John J. Parker said:

'GOOD FAITH' ASSUMED

"No one need have any fear" of being in contempt of court if the trustees act in good faith. "I assume the trustees are going to obey."

The mystery is where the judge found a basis for his assumption, since, as the Associated Press reported, "The trustees have announced they will close the schools rather than mix white and Negro pupils."

A similar ruling was handed down by a federal court in a Prince Edward County, Va. school case.

In effect, the lower courts are enjoining Jim Crow school boards from segregating school children - after some undetermined date.

Imagine a court issuing an injunction against picketing with a proviso that the picketing may continue, however, until the union finds it feasible to discontinue the strike!

This is the kind of stalling and "good faith" that can generally be expected of the Deep South under the Supreme Court's ruling that segregated schools are illegal but the local authorities can decide how and when to abolish them.

What does this mean? It means that the limit of reform of some of the worst evils of segregation through legal channels alone has been reached.

If the struggle for integration of public schools remains within the straitjacket of court procedures, it can only be a costly and demoralizing experience.

Those states or local school districts with proportionately fewer Negroes, where maintaining separate schools has become a serious financial burden, may possibly use the Supreme Court decision to release them from laws requiring segregation. Some have already done so. A number began the process before the Supreme Court ruling of May 1954.

* * *

BORDER STATES DESEGREGATE

Eight months before the decision the Topeka, Kansas board of education voted to end segregation in elementary grades as rapidly as possible. Atchison, Wichita and Pittsburg acted before Topeka, and Kansas City, Lawrence, Leavenworth and other Kansas cities followed.

In Arizona state courts had already declared segregation illegal in public education and local schools had begun integration in 1953.

There
isn't much
of this!



(Registration at a
Baltimore kindergar-
ten, Sept. 1954)

But in those states where the proportion of Negroes in the population is greatest, such as Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia, the Supreme Court ruling is being used to mobilize the white supremacists not only against integration but against extension of any democratic rights to the Negro masses.

In Georgia, for example, the state board of education announced on August 1 that teachers may not belong to the N. A. A. C. P. "or any allied organization or subversive organization," on penalty of revocation of teaching licenses "for life."

Negroes have never been able to, and cannot now, base their struggle for equality on illusions as to the "good faith" of their enemies in the executive, legislative or judicial branches of local, state or federal government. As a matter of fact, they must, and in practice do, start by recognizing the "bad faith" of the authorities. Then a sober estimation of the relationship of forces can be made and tactics planned to take advantage of the situation where it is favorable, or to change the relationship of forces where it is not.

SEGREGATION IN THE NORTH

Both friends and foes of integration know that segregated schools are not an isolated problem: It will not be possible to abolish Jim Crow in education so long as we have segregated housing, discrimination in employment, racial limitations on political action ranging from restrictions on voting to lack of democratic representation in elective and appointive positions.

The experience in the North proves this. Even where state or local laws do not require segregation, or even where they specifically bar it, the majority of Negroes go to separate and inferior schools because they are forced to live in rundown, overcrowded slums and the schools reflect the composition and economic status of the communities in which they are located.

With few exceptions, Negroes are still employed, for the most part, in the lowest paying jobs and cannot afford to buy or rent homes in better neighborhoods. Even the small number with slightly higher incomes are barred by real estate interests and banks, by refusal to sell or lend money, by intimidation and physical attacks by hoodlums.

Although in general segregation is not as extreme in the North, racial discrimination in the South is not a "local" problem, but rather the fountain head of Jim Crow throughout the United States. Any attempts by Negroes concentrated in industrial centers in the North and West, where their economic and political weight is greatest, to secure national reforms is consistently stymied by the fact that the South, where the majority of the colored people still live, is "democratically" represented in Congress and the federal government by avowed enemies of equal rights for Negroes.

The two party monopoly in politics makes a farce of democratic electoral procedures for minorities. No one, not even Negro representatives from Northern colored districts, can win significant legislation in Congress or effective federal administration of rights guaranteed in the Constitution for the South.

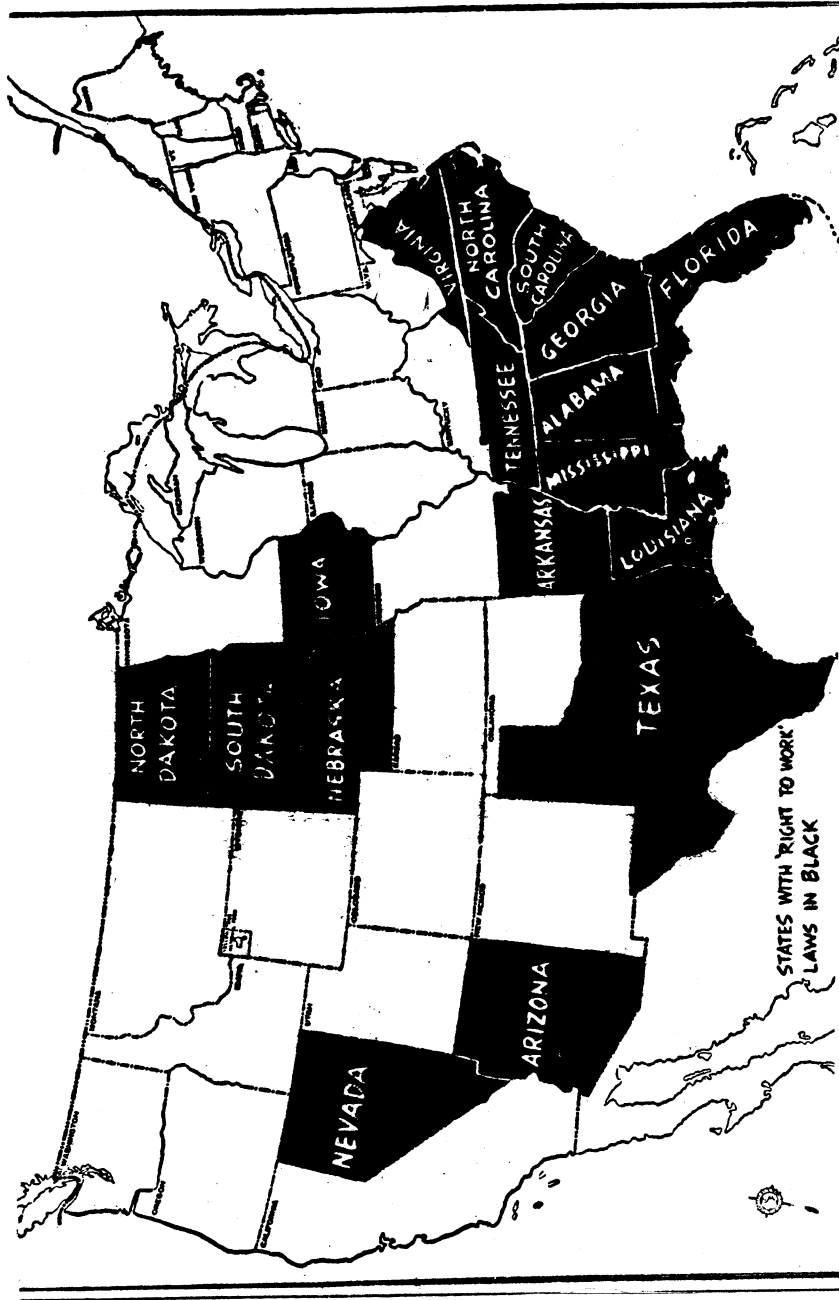
TWEEDLE-DUM AND TWEEDLE-DEE

The reason: There are no basic differences in program or principle between the Democratic and Republican parties. Sectional differences within each party on specific issues, such as civil rights for Negroes, are always subordinated to party unity in order to maintain the balance of power between the two political machines.

Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, a Democrat elected from the Harlem district of New York City, attempted to extend the Supreme Court ruling on school segregation to legislation in the 1955 session of the U.S. Congress. He led the fight for amendments to school construction, housing, and military reserves bills which would have denied federal funds where segregation is practiced. The result was defeat of the amendments and a direct attack on Powell by President Eisenhower, who called the amendments "extraneous" and "erroneous," while in no way criticizing the anti-Negro opponents of the measures.

This intervention by the Administration against attempts to legislate against racial discrimination is consistent with the Chief Executive's message to the 46th annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in June. He said in a telegram:

"I trust that in the decade ahead your organization will display both wisdom and patience as it continues to bear its share of the responsibility for the betterment of the country as a whole."



As of October 1954, the above 17 states had adopted laws that bar the enforcement of union security provisions in collective bargaining agreements. Florida adopted its law in 1944; eleven states adopted their laws in 1947; five states adopted these "right to work" laws between 1952 and 1954. Note the similarity in states enforcing segregation and these anti-union laws.

It is clear from this message and the attack on the Powell amendments that the failure of the Supreme Court to say when and how desegregation should be put into effect was no accident. The express policy of the Administration is that segregation is to be outlawed some time, *but not now.*

The Negro people do not agree. Speaking at the NAACP convention the day after receiving the President's message, Thurgood Marshall, the special counsel who led the court fight against school segregation, told the delegates:

"Apart from the avowed enemies of Democracy and integration there are many Americans who actually are or appear to be in favor of eventual integration after a period of time. We are beginning to get advice publicly and privately from these alleged friends urging us not to be impatient, not to rock the boat, not to push ahead too rapidly. I believe it is time that we examined this advice and gave to these advisers the facts of life. In regard to the elimination of racial discrimination in this country, Negroes *are* impatient. They *are* insistent. They are determined to get their rights as rapidly as possible."

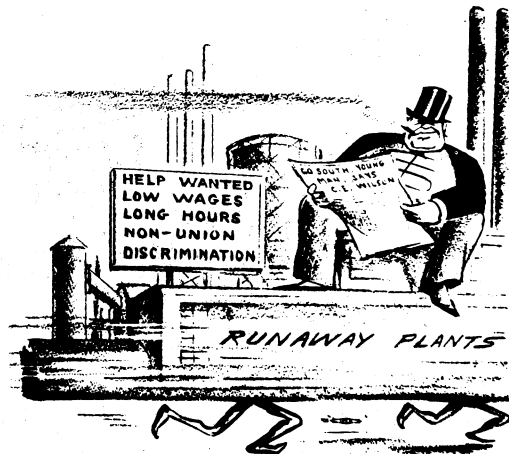
RELATIONSHIP OF FORCES

Mr. Marshall is right. But the \$64 question is *how?* How can the power of the white supremacists in their Southern stronghold be broken? - Can the relationship of forces, now so unfavorable for winning Negro equality, be changed?

According to the 1950 census, there were 134,942,028 persons listed as white, and 15,755,333 colored in the United States. That would present a pretty hopeless situation for the minority...if the issue is seen as simply one of white vs. colored. Such a small minority, ten per cent of the population, could not possibly outvote the other 90 per cent in "democratic" elections, or raise a larger fund to pay the costs of court cases. And to use force, no matter how just the cause, would be suicide.

But, fortunately, the decisive division of forces in this country is not based on color. There are many kinds of conflicting interests pitted against each other, and there are divisions within them. But the biggest, the most persistent and most fundamental conflict is the daily struggle between labor and those who own and control the industries of this country, over wages and profits. And this conflict is inseparably related to the Negro struggle for equality.

The relationship of forces between organized labor and the industrialists has now reached a point in its development that demands a unified struggle by labor if it is to be at all effective in dealing with the highly organized employers. This requires not only the joining of forces by mergers of CIO, AFL and other



unions, but also a conscious program of action against the campaign of Big Business to destroy the bargaining strength of the unions by pitting them against each other and against the unorganized workers.

During World War II the demand for labor induced the industrialists not only to hire Negroes and inexperienced or untrained white workers who migrated to the North in large numbers, but to build plants in the South, as well. In the post-war period of cut-backs in production, many companies found it more economical to shut down their Northern plants and shift production to the South, where the standard of living and costs generally were lower, where union organization was weakest.

INDUSTRY GOES SOUTH

They have continued a policy of decentralization of industry to such an extent that some unions, such as textile, have been forced to accept wage cuts and deterioration of working conditions in the vain hope that they could avoid runaway shops, loss of jobs and loss of members. Many other unions are similarly threatened.

At the same time Southern businessmen have organized to make the South even more attractive to industry by a campaign to keep unions out. An article in Labor's Daily by Sidney Lens (May 20, 1955) reported:

"That all of this is well organized is self-evident from the fact that fully 56.6 per cent of all eligible southern employers are now enrolled in the viciously anti-labor National Association of Manufacturers. Only one out of every 10 workers carries a union card down South, but almost two of every three bosses carries the NAM insignia of antiunionism in his wallet. And these men are

hell bent to keep unions out. After all, they lured thousands of plants into the area by the promise of near zero taxes and low non-union wages. They now have to deliver on their promises."

The way they deliver is through local ordinances penalizing union organization, through intimidation of workers and union organizers by methods which include physical violence, and by passing state "right to work laws" against the "right to work" of unionists.

"In one town in Georgia," Lens reported, "they've passed a law requiring union organizers to pay a \$1,000 license fee and \$100 a day for each day they work at the task. Another town charges \$2,000. In still another bastion of democracy, in Tennessee, they've made it illegal for a union organizer to visit a worker's home without a written invitation in advance, on penalty of \$50 for each transgression."

RACISTS ANTI-LABOR

These obstacles to labor's organizing drive in the South are directly related to the fight against segregation. It is no mere coincidence that of the 17 states which had passed "right to work" laws by 1954, 12 were states which also legally required or permitted segregation in public schools. Alabama passed its anti-union shop law in 1953, and Mississippi, South Carolina and Louisiana in 1954, in the same period that they were passing special measures against desegregation of schools.

The anti-labor white supremacists who rule the South know that the only way they can remain in power is by preventing the majority - the working people - from uniting to use their economic and political strength. That means enforcement of segregation in schools, in unions, in public and private life; restrictions on voting; denial of civil rights.

The anti-labor National Association of Manufacturers and its Northern members also know this, and will not permit any federal action to interfere with "states's rights" to discriminate against organized labor and Negroes.

The labor movement must fight back or lose the battle. They must organize the South or face a loss of bargaining strength in the rest of the country. A fourth of the Southern labor force consists of Negroes. They must be organized, and the only way this can be done in industry, as the CIO learned in the North in the Thirties, is on a non-segregated basis.

To defend their right to organize, the unions must fight the reactionary anti-labor laws of the South politically. The mass of Negroes and poor whites must be assured the right to vote and defended in exercising it.

Negroes make up more than 45 per cent of the population in Mississippi, 38 per cent in South Carolina, 33 per cent in Louisiana, 32 per cent in Alabama, 30 per cent in Georgia. The Southern politicians know what a potential threat these numbers are to their rule. That is why Rev. George W. Lee, Mississippi NAACP leader who campaigned for Negroes to register and vote, was murdered last May, and why no attempt was made to find the men who shot him.

LABOR MUST FIGHT JIM CROW

The labor movement and the Negro movement have common interests and a common enemy. They support each other's legislative demands and civil rights battles in the courts. But convention resolutions, legal briefs and similar expressions of good will do not meet the crisis now facing them. A new approach and new methods are needed. This is a big fight and every worker who wants to protect union conditions will have to take a stand. To equalize wages upward instead of down to the Southern level, and to combat the runaway shop, he will have to insist on organization of the South in the only way it can be organized -- by fighting for equal rights for Negroes.

The Supreme Court decisions on desegregation have demonstrated the limitations of purely legal campaigns.

With Washington under the pressure of the "cold war", of the colonial uprisings in Asia and Africa, and of American business and political interests jockeying for position in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, American Negroes were able to take their grievances to the court of world opinion in 1954.

No official or unofficial salesman for the State Department could go abroad without being asked by the colored colonial people, "If your chief concern, as you say, is to lead the 'free world' in spreading democracy, why do you deny it to American Negroes?"

With this assist from their allies abroad, the growth of the Negro population as a political factor in the industrial centers, and the courageous persistence of Southern Negroes willing to suffer the consequences of opposing state laws, the colored people of the United

States were able to wring a concession from the Supreme Court and the Administration - the admission that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.

PROGRAM OF ACTION

But that is as far as Washington intends to go. It is time for the organized labor and Negro movements to say Jim Crow must go *now* and to organize a militant campaign of independent mass action, a crusade that will enlist the millions of unorganized workers, the youth, and the middle class of this country. For this a broad program of action is necessary, which includes the following main points:

1. A drive, using the Supreme Court decision as a wedge, to desegregate the schools *now*. Support the NAACP legal actions (petitions to school boards, court cases, etc.) but recognize the interest and responsibility of the labor movement in desegregation. Submit petitions and institute suits by national and local unions. Take direct action - - by Negro and white parents - - as the Negro parents in Hillsboro, Ohio are doing, refusing to permit their children to attend segregated schools.

The courts have ruled that Bryant Bowles, the professional race-hater who agitated and instigated demonstrations in Delaware and Maryland against integration was acting legally. The labor-Negro drive should use its rights to organize mass meetings, demonstrations, protests, boycotts and picket lines against segregation.

They should conduct a campaign of education through radio, television, movies, newspapers, pamphlets, classes - all the mass media possible today.

They should conduct a principled, uncompromising struggle against discrimination simultaneously on all fronts: housing, industry, unions, the armed forces, voting and political rights.

2. Union defense guards should be organized wherever necessary to protect Negroes and union men from physical attack. The past year has seen a new wave of beatings of union organizers by hired thugs. In Mississippi the new Ku Klux Klan -- the so-called Citizen Council is conducting an all-out campaign of threats and intimidation against Negroes. The murder of colored citizens seeking to exercise the right to vote has become a national scandal.

Union defense guards should come to the aid of those threatened.

3. A national union drive to organize the South and other unorganized areas on a completely non-segregated basis, to raise the standard of living and wages of the workers, eliminate discriminatory differentials between North and South, Negro and white, men and women.

4. A united offensive attacking all reactionary laws against civil rights and workers' rights: limitations on freedom of speech, press and opinion; discriminatory voting restrictions; thought control measures like "loyalty" oaths, censorship, the so-called Communist Control Act; segregation laws; Taft-Hartley and "right to work" laws; union licensing ordinances, etc.

5. Solidarity with the struggles of the colonial masses of Asia, Africa and South America and workers throughout the world. Their struggle for independence from foreign rule and exploitation is basically the same -- to raise their standard of living and to eliminate the differentials and the white supremacy policies that make it possible to pit one section of the world working class against another.

6. An end to the bankrupt policy of trying to reform the anti-labor, Jim Crow Democratic and Republican parties. Boycott them in favor of independent political action. Organize a labor party.

BASIC CHANGE NEEDED

The complete victory of labor and the Negro people in the struggle against exploitation and discrimination requires something more than the program outlined above. It requires the elimination of the underlying cause - the system of production for profit, of private ownership of industry and division of society into classes with antagonistic interests.

As long as industry can operate only if it makes a profit, the conflict will continue between capital and labor over what part of the value produced shall go to the workers in the form of wages and what part to the capitalists in the form of profits. And as long as that conflict continues, the owners of industry will try to keep the working class divided. In America that means segregation.

The majority of the working people in this country may not yet be convinced by their experience that a change to socialism is necessary. But the basis for mobilization of the advanced workers in a united struggle for limited common aims is here. The organized Negro and labor movements must fight segregation or lose ground before the combined economic and political attack against them.

Not through patience and a century of expensive litigation, but through militant, united action NOW will gains be made.