

# GOOD RESOLUTIONS VERSUS BAD PRACTICE IN NEGRO WORK

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THE importance of a correct policy in the Negro work is fundamental for the building of the revolutionary unions of the Trade Union Unity League. This truth has been reiterated time and time again, but its significance has not yet been brought home fully to our Red Trade Union movement. In handling the Trade Union question generally the work of TUUL organizations displays many serious failings.

The greatest weakness in our Negro work is the tendency, more or less general, to adopt good resolutions for work among the Negroes and then to fail to put them into practice. That is to say, our Negro work still remains pretty much a question of propaganda and agitation, not a matter of real struggle.

It is all well and good to put out general slogans for equality of the Negroes, for self-determination, against lynching, and for general economic and political demands. It is also correct to draw Negro workers in substantial numbers into our leading committees, conferences, etc. Both of these things our unions are quite generally doing. But they are decidedly not enough. The real test of our Negro work comes in the every day fight in support of the immediate demands of the Negroes. Unless our Unions know how to conduct this immediate fight our whole Negro program will rest pretty much in thin air and will not attract the support of the Negro masses.

To carry on this every day fight for the demands of the Negro workers requires on our part a ceaseless fight against all under-estimation of the importance of the Negro question, and especially against the many serious developments of white-chauvinism, both of which tendencies are still strongly in evidence in the TUUL Unions.

A typical example of the under-estimation of the struggle for the immediate economic and political demands of the Negro workers, and consequently of the Negro question in general, is exemplified by the fact that the National Railroad Industrial League, up until a couple of months ago, had no program of demands for Negro workers, in spite of the fact that the railroad industry is perhaps the worse jim-crow industry in the United States and employs great numbers of Negro workers. The same under-estimation is shown in the case of the Marine Workers Industrial Union, which even yet has no program of economic demands of Negroes, not with-standing the many thousands of Negroes working aboard ships and on the waterfront under severe conditions of discrimination.

In the National Miners Union there were manifested serious signs of white-chauvinism, which the union did not vigorously enough combat. Among these were moves to exclude Negro women from the Women's Auxiliaries, and, during the later stages of the big strike, tendencies to discriminate against Negroes in the distribution of strike relief.

All three of these unions, of course, are very aggressive in agitating general slogans for Negro equality. But they are not acute enough in supporting these slogans by a militant struggle in the every day practice against all forms of jim-crowism and discrimination against Negroes.

The above cited instances represent very serious weaknesses. But some tendencies in the work of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union are as bad, if not worse. Thus many complaints are made by Negro workers that their grievances are not properly taken care of in shops where our Union either controls or has a considerable following.

This situation in the Needle Trades emphasizes a matter of the most basic importance to the TUUL unions. This is that unless our organizations show the utmost militancy in the defense of the shop grievances of the Negro workers we may be sure that this will react ery disastrously against us. Such tendencies as those complained of in the Needle Trades must be ruthlessly irradicated.

In the case of the Needle Trades it appears to be a case of actual neglect of the grievances of Negro workers. This must be cured. But it is not enough, as some comrades say, "to treat the Negro grievances the same as those of white workers." Such a formulation shows on the face of it an under-estimation of the fight necessary in defense of the Negro workers. The very essence of the matter is that special attention must be given to defending the shop grievances of Negro workers. This is because the employers and shop-bosses carry on a systematic policy of special discrimination against Negro workers upon every occasion. As everyone knows who has had any experience in American industry, the grievances of Negro workers are much more prevalent, more stubborn in character, and more difficult to handle by a union than those of white workers. Disputes of white workers with their bosses which can often be readily settled by shop committees or even by individual workers develop, where similar instances occur in the case of Negro workers, into grievances that can only be liquidated by mass pressure from the union. Besides this, the grievances of Negro workers, arising out of long entrenched jim-crow practices and white-chauvinism are often subtle in character.

From all this it is clear that there exists a sharp necessity for our unions to be especially alert in defending the interests of Negro workers. It is not that the unions have to fight for better conditions for Negro workers than white workers have—the Negro workers do not expect that. The real issue is that because of the peculiar, wide-spread and stubborn character of the grievances of Negro workers the unions have to be especially awake and vigorous in the handling of these grievances. The acid test of the attitude of the TUUL unions towards the Negro workers, and the high-road to the organization of Negro workers, is the proper defense of their everyday demands.