

The Fight to Abolish Segregated Schools

By Doxey A. Wilkerson

WHEN THE Supreme Court of the United States declared unanimously on May 17th that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and that public school segregation "is a denial of the equal protection of the laws," it struck a mighty blow at the entire system of racial segregation in our country. In destroying the legal validity of segregated schools, it also undermined the "white superiority" rationale for all other forms of anti-Negro discrimination, whether imposed by the state or by custom. Thus, this decision lays the basis for—and will surely help to stimulate—a concerted and powerful assault by the Negro people against the whole rotten structure of Jim Crow oppression.

How does it happen that this momentous democratic victory is won from the High Court of U.S. imperialism precisely when the monopoly ruling class is stepping-up its reactionary drive to fascism and war? Does this decision mean that segregated schools will really be abolished, in fact? Will this decision strengthen the role of the Negro people in the developing coalition for democracy and peace; or will it make them more susceptible to influence

by the demagoguery of the Eisenhower Administration?

The answer to the first question lies in the new high level of development of the Negro people's movement and its relations to other democratic forces in our country and throughout the world. The answers to the other two questions will be forged in the crucible of struggle which lies ahead; and the role of the Communist Party and of the Left forces it directly influences can do much to guarantee a progressive outcome.

FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS OF THE COURT DECISION

The brief filed with the Supreme Court last winter by attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People declared that "the plain purpose and effect of segregated education is to perpetuate an inferior status for Negroes which is America's sorry heritage from slavery."* Thus did these spokesmen for the Negro people correctly pose the segregated schools issue squarely within the framework

* *Brief for Appellants in Nos. 1, 2 and 4 and for Respondents in No. 10 on Reargument*, in the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1953, page 17.

of the broader struggle for full Negro democratic rights. They pointed out that "the primary purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment was to deprive the states of *all* power to perpetuate such a caste system"; and the clear implication of the Court decision upholding their argument is that the Constitution forbids *all legal sanctions* for segregation or other forms of racial discrimination.

This principle, of course, is yet to be translated into practice; and its implementation will require even more powerful struggles than those which led to victory in the courts. But let none underestimate the far-reaching significance of the Supreme Court's ruling in the segregated schools cases; for it is a powerful blow at the main super-structural buttress of the Jim Crow system as a whole.

Historically, it was not as a result of chauvinist attitudes among the Southern white masses, but rather in order to spread and perpetuate white chauvinism, that the post-Reconstruction legislatures made it mandatory for white and Negro children to attend separate schools. They well understood that the impact of school segregation on generation after generation of Southern youth would be to dissipate the Negro-white unity developing during Reconstruction, to drive a powerful ideological wedge between the white and Negro masses, and thus to secure Bourbon dominance as the political guarantee of imperialist superprofits from the South.

Of course, the restored Bourbon lieutenants of monopoly capital did not rely on segregated schools alone to keep the white and Negro masses divided. They erected an imposing edifice of Jim Crow laws—regarding employment, the vote, the courts, housing, transportation, restaurants, theatres, parks, public buildings, etc., as well as schools—and supplemented that with a concerted campaign of white chauvinist propaganda and a prolonged orgy of lynch-terror. Such is the elaborate Jim Crow superstructure maintained in the South to protect Wall Street's multi-billion dollar stake in the oppression of the Negro people. But nothing in this whole set-up has done more to corrupt the Southern white masses with chauvinist poison and to breed hostility between Negro and white than the system of segregated schools.

Consider, concretely, what *full* implementation of the Supreme Court's decision outlawing segregated schools would mean in the South. Some 9,000,000 white children and 2,600,000 Negro children now attending segregated elementary and secondary schools would be brought together in the classroom and on the playground. The social content of their courses of study would have to be revised progressively in the light of the new situation. Several hundred thousand white and Negro teachers would be brought into direct association; and their now separate professional organizations would merge for a common approach to their common problems. White and Negro

parents in thousands of communities would begin to work together in the P.T.A.'s. And this process of building Negro-white unity would extend to scores of thousands of youth and their teachers in hundreds of Southern colleges and universities.

The impact of any such development as this would help shatter the whole structure of Jim Crow laws and practices in all fields. White chauvinism is not a "natural" phenomenon; it is learned only if it is taught—and probably no single force is more effective in teaching it than segregation in the schools.

That is why the Dixiecrats are plotting in every possible way to nullify the decision in practice. That is why the Eisenhower Administration may be expected to exploit the Court's ruling to the full in the quest of allies in war and of votes in the '54 elections, while quietly helping to sabotage the principle it proclaims. And that is why the labor-progressive forces of our country must support the Negro people to the hilt in their fight to abolish segregated schools in fact.

Marxists understand, of course, that the full abolition of school segregation in the South will not come through struggles in the social superstructure alone. There will have to be powerful and winning assaults against the material foundations of Jim Crow schools, especially job discrimination in industry, semi-feudal survivals on the land, and ghetto housing. But Marxists also under-

stand that struggles on both these levels interpenetrate, and that the recent Court decision enhances the effectiveness of both.

THE NEW HIGH LEVEL OF THE NEGRO PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT

Fifty-eight years ago one Homer Adolphe Plessy appealed to the Supreme Court to reverse on constitutional grounds his conviction for deliberate violation of "The Separate Cars Law" of Louisiana. He was backed by the New Orleans Citizens Committee for Annulment of Act III of the Louisiana Legislature of 1890. The case was argued on April 13, 1896; and on the following May 18th, the Court affirmed Plessy's conviction by a vote of 7 to 1—the only dissent coming from Southern-born Justice John Marshall Harlan. Here was established the legal fraud of "separate but equal," designed to nullify the Fourteenth Amendment and to reconcile the oppression of the Negro people with the Constitution of the United States.

The white chauvinist arrogance of the then ascendant U.S. imperialism—just two years before its colonizing ventures in the Caribbean and the Pacific—is reflected in the Supreme Court's pronouncement that:

Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and

political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane. . . .

This reactionary decision, clearly reflecting the political climate of the 1890's, remained to thwart all legal assaults against intra-state segregation until only a few weeks ago. In 1927, for example, when the validity of statutes making segregated schools compulsory was brought before the Supreme Court for the first time, Chief Justice Taft, speaking for the Court, refused even to consider the matter.

With how much more deliberation—and with what a changed point of view—did the Court find it necessary to examine the constitutionality of anti-Negro segregation in 1954!

The five segregated schools cases recently decided by the Supreme Court—arising in South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, Kansas and District of Columbia—were first argued in the Court in December 1952. They were restored to the docket for legal briefs and further argument in June 1953. The re-argument took place in December 1953. The unanimous decision was handed down in May 1954. And still more argument, on decrees to implement the decision, is scheduled for the next term of the Court, which begins in October 1954.

Moreover, the Court no longer dares hurl chauvinist insults at the

Negro people. Rather, it declares that "we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the [Fourteenth] Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written"; and that:

In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We think it does.

The explanation of this complete reversal is found in the new high level of development attained by the Negro people's movement and its relations to the forces of democracy and peace in our country and throughout the world.

The Negro people constitute a far more powerful force today than they did in the mid-nineties. By then Reconstruction Democracy had been thoroughly defeated; and Bourbon reaction, newly wedded to the rising U.S. imperialism, was the unquestioned master of the South. Overwhelmingly concentrated on the countryside in the Southern states, the Negro masses were disfranchised, lynched by the thousands, and vir-

tually reenslaved by new versions of the "Black Codes." Moreover, they stood practically alone in the midst of white chauvinist reaction, without any effective allies. *Plessy v. Ferguson* came at the lowest point reached by the Negro liberation movement since the Civil War.

Today the picture is markedly different. There are many great mass organizations of the Negro people, all dedicated to the fight for full democratic rights. Increasingly entrenched in the economic and political life of the country, predominantly urban, the Negro people's movement has been further strengthened by the emergence of a mass industrial proletariat—first established in northern cities during World War I, greatly enlarged and brought into the labor movement during the "New Deal" and World War II, extended increasingly in the South during the post-war years, and now bringing millions of Negro workers into new relations with white workers in the trade-union movement.

Moreover, the tremendous impetus which the anti-Axis war gave to the Negro liberation movement has persisted to the present day. It is reflected in the growing unity of the whole Negro people around increasingly advanced demands—most notably for F.E.P.C. legislation, for the abolition of Jim Crow in the armed services, for the vote and election to public office, and now for the elimination of segregated schools.

In this latter connection, it is important to note that practically the

whole Negro people was mobilized in the fight to outlaw segregated schools. Many thousands of churches, mass fraternal organizations, college fraternities and sororities, business and professional associations of all kinds, social clubs, many other groups and the entire Negro press—all gave political and financial support to the campaign. Every Negro community in the country was involved. Not for many decades has there been such an all-embracing mobilization of the Negro people as in this struggle to eliminate segregated schools.

Another big difference between the mid-nineties and the mid-fifties is that the Negro people no longer stand alone; they have and are developing important allies. The fight to outlaw segregated schools, for example, had the formal backing of A. F. of L. and C.I.O., many national and local unions, the American Jewish Congress, other mass organizations of the Jewish people, and scores of predominantly white professional and community organizations throughout the nation. Such allies are also evident in the universality with which the Court decision is being hailed in the North and West, and by the widespread—perhaps even majority—support it is receiving from labor, church, professional, political and student groups in the South.

Still further, the Negro people's most recent challenge to *Plessy v. Ferguson* came before the Supreme Court at a time when U.S. impe-

rialism was no longer on the way up, as it was 58 years ago. Today, despite its bellicose posture, American imperialism is desperately trying to hold on in the face of formidable opposition and growing challenge from the democratic peace forces throughout the world; and the Negro question is probably the most vulnerable flaw in the ideological armor of the State Department.

The Jim Crow oppression of the Negro people in our country is well known and strongly denounced throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. It provides dramatic refutation of the "democratic" slogans behind which our war-bound Government tries to mobilize allies for another imperialist war to crush the powerful and growing liberation struggles of colonial and semi-colonial peoples. The peoples of the world distrust and hate the American ruling class more because of its oppression of the Negro people than for any other one reason.

Confronted with the democratic demands of the powerful Negro people's movement and its allies on the home front, and by almost universal condemnation abroad of the white chauvinist oppression of the Negro people in this country, American imperialism was forced to make a big concession in the field of Negro democratic rights—to discard the cherished "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The legal issues before the Court were the same in 1954 as in 1896;

but the *political* situation was entirely different. Thus, what the earlier Court could do with arrogance in thirty-six days, the present Court could not do at all. It had to bow to the increased power of the Negro people and their democratic, peace-loving allies in our country and throughout the world. And within the complex of progressive developments responsible for the outlawing of segregated schools, the major cause was the unity and militancy in struggle of the Negro masses and their leaders in the N.A.A.C.P.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE NEGRO LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Analysis of the broad campaign which led to the outlawing of segregated schools offers important theoretical insights into the nature and present stage of development of the Negro people's movement.

First, the fight to abolish segregated schools highlights the fact that educational inequalities are viewed as a major issue among the Negro people.

The Negro's fight for education began during slavery, in the stealthy efforts of the slaves to learn to read and write despite prohibitive laws carrying stiff penalties. It has grown in breadth and power ever since; and, in both the North and the South, the issue of segregated schools has loomed large in the struggle for equality of educational opportunity.

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ample, Negroes in many Northern cities were developing big campaigns to abolish segregated schools. The fight was won in Boston in 1855; and at a dinner celebrating the victory, William C. Nell—leader of the movement—paid special tribute to the role of women in the militant struggle. And, said Nell:

On the morning preceding their advent to the public schools, I saw from my window a boy passing the exclusive [Jim Crow] Smith School (where he had been a pupil) and, raising his hands, he exultingly exclaimed to his companions, "Good bye forever, colored school! Tomorrow we are like other Boston boys!"*

The struggle reached a high point in the Southern states right after the Civil War. As Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois points out in *Black Reconstruction in America* (p. 641), there was an "extraordinary mass demand on the part of the black laboring class for education," and this demand "was the effective force for the establishment of the public school in the South on a permanent basis, for all peoples and classes." Many of those early public schools in the Reconstruction South were "mixed schools," where white and Negro children studied together; and Negro leaders held important administrative and supervisory positions in these newly established state systems of public schools.

But this progressive development

in the South was destroyed with the restoration of Bourbon dominance in the period of rising imperialism. Racial segregation was decreed as the law of the land; and Negro children were relegated to disgracefully inferior schools which have handicapped several generations of Negro youth. Many hundreds of thousands have had no schools whatever.

A decade-and-a-half-ago I had occasion to make a survey of these Negro separate schools in all of the Southern states. My findings—published in a book recently blacklisted by McCarthyism as "Communitic"—were summarized in these words:*

In general, and especially in rural areas, Negro elementary pupils attend extremely impoverished, small, short-term schools, lacking in transportation service, void of practically every kind of instructional equipment, and staffed by relatively unprepared, overloaded teachers whose compensation does not approximate a subsistence wage. The vast majority of pupils progress through only the primary grades of these schools. . . .

Schools for white children in these states, although far below national standards, were greatly superior to Negro schools in the same communities—and gross disparities between the two exist to this day.

This continuing state of affairs has always been a major issue among the Negro people of the South. As during slavery and Reconstruction, so

* Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (N. Y., 1951), pp. 377-78. Many other documents in this work reflect similar struggles elsewhere.

* *Special Problems of Negro Education* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), pp. 151-152.

today, they look upon education as a necessary instrument in the struggle against Jim Crow oppression.

Negroes have fought in all kinds of ways to win decent schools for their children—through petitions, delegations, protest meetings, legislative lobbies, and enormous fund-raising campaigns. During recent decades their emphasis has been on legal action under the leadership of N.A.A.C.P., for "equality of educational opportunity" in the Negro separate school. Moreover, they have won some important victories—in increasing teachers' salaries, lengthening school terms, extending school plant and equipment, and in winning the right to attend graduate and professional schools in the South.

Thus, the recent and continuing fight to abolish segregated schools climaxes many generations of struggles for educational opportunity. It underscores the fact that the right to education is approached as a basic economic and political question by the Negro people.

Second, the fight to abolish segregated schools emphasizes the key role of the Negro nation in the struggle for Negro liberation.

It is significant that this new high level in the fight for equality of educational opportunity was initiated by Negro working-class and agrarian masses in the Black Belt. It began about four years ago in local struggles for improvement of the woefully inadequate Negro schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where Negroes constitute more than half

the population, and in Clarendon County, South Carolina, where Negroes are nearly four-fifths of the total. Frustrated in their efforts to gain substantial improvements in the Negro separate schools, the Negro community raised the demand that their children be allowed to attend the far superior white schools.

In Prince Edward County, for example, the struggle gave rise to a dramatic strike of Negro high school students in Farmville, the county seat. Strike headquarters were established in the basement of the local church. Effectively organized picket-lines closed down the ancient and over-crowded Robert Moton High School. Delegations of students went to the County Superintendent of Schools, demanding immediate guarantees that long-unkept promises to build a new high school be fulfilled. And the adult Negro community expressed full support for the strike at a series of mass meetings in the church.

Whereas Prince Edward County provided only one dilapidated high school for the Negro majority population, there were three fine high schools for the white minority; and this striking contrast intensified the determination of the Negro people to make this a winning fight. In time, getting nowhere with public school authorities, the Negro students and their parents raised the demand that all schools in the County be opened to all students. The strikers refused to return to their classrooms until State officials of the N.A.A.C.P.

were called in and agreed to start legal action to abolish school segregation in the County. The sequel to this and similar struggles elsewhere is the historic victory of May 17th in the Supreme Court.

There is nothing accidental in the fact that the advanced—even "radical"—movement to abolish segregated schools arose within the Negro nation. It is in the Black Belt counties that the most glaring inequalities exist between white and Negro schools—due largely to the general practice of diverting to schools for the white minority most of the per capita money which county authorities get from "state equalization funds" on the basis of the Negro majority population. It is precisely in these areas that the Negro masses feel the deepest resentment over educational discriminations. It is here that they wage the sharpest and most consistent struggles for equality of educational opportunity. And it is but natural that these struggles of the most oppressed, in the territorial area of the Negro nation, should give rise to the most advanced position the Negro people in the South have taken in the fight for educational opportunity since the days of Reconstruction.

Incidentally, this development illustrates a process which future struggles for Negro freedom will repeat over and over again. Fights for limited reforms, initiated among working people in local communities of the Black Belt, will develop into widespread struggles for much more

radical demands, and will win the active support of the entire Negro people. In time, the Negro movement as a whole, its partial and immediate demands thwarted by U.S. imperialism and its Bourbon lackeys in the South, will enter upon the far more fundamental struggles which inhere in its national liberation goals.

Third, the successful struggle to outlaw segregated schools demonstrates both the leading role of Negro workers and the all-class, national character of the Negro liberation movement.

As illustrated in the case of Prince Edward County, Virginia—and as was also true in Clarendon County, South Carolina—the driving force behind this movement was the Negro working class and agrarian masses. It was their pressure, from below, that moved the middle-class leaders of N.A.A.C.P. into struggle for the advanced demands of integrated schools. But it was the able leadership of the N.A.A.C.P. that mobilized the best professional talent in the land for effective argument in the courts, and rallied the whole Negro people, together with their allies, in powerful support.

This relationship of class forces in the Negro movement is at the present time dominant. The Negro workers are now the main dynamic force, ever pressing for new gains in the fight for democratic rights. But we have not reached the stage of working class hegemony over the Negro liberation movement; proletarian leaders are not yet the

chief spokesmen of the Negro people. The Negro middle class, itself a victim of national oppression, is overwhelmingly committed to the fight for Negro democratic rights, despite its vacillations and reformist illusions; and its representatives are the most influential leaders of the Negro working-class masses.

Marxists understand, of course, that the full unity and power of the Negro liberation movement can be achieved only with the leadership of Negro workers. We will do everything we can to strengthen the leading role of Negro workers as the most militant and stable force for progress among the Negro people. At the same time our basic approach to the Negro liberation movement today must proceed from the understanding that all-class, national unity is absolutely essential for success.

Fourth, the struggle to abolish segregated schools illustrates the stake which white workers have in the fight for Negro rights, and the fact that they can be won as allies of the Negro people.

The generally low level of efficiency which characterizes schools for white children in the South—is as compared with national standards—is a direct result of segregation in Negro schools. The budgets of southern states are simply incapable of financing two separate systems of schools. Both departments of their “dual school system” necessarily suffer—the Negro, of course, worse than the white.

Thus it is that the Southern white masses seem to be rejecting the Byrnes-Talmadge proposal to circumvent the Court ruling by turning the public schools over to private agencies. Thus it is also that the Georgia Federation of Labor, a number of local trade unions, the Southern Baptist Church Convention, some newspapers, and many professional, student and other groups of Southern whites have spoken up in support of the Court decision. It is quite unlikely that the South will permit the Dixiecrats to dismantle the public school system which the people are eager to have improved; and it is evident that many white Southerners understand that one integrated system of schools can, in time, provide much improved education for white as well as Negro children.

More than this, Jim Crow schools and other forms of racial segregation are a great obstacle to the building of a strong trade-union movement; and it appears that even conservative leaders of labor are beginning to understand this fact. The C.I.O., for example, filed an *amicus* brief with the Supreme Court calling for the outlawing of segregated schools; and more recently it gave \$75,000 from the Philip Murray Memorial Fund to the Educational Equality Fund of the N.A.A.C.P., and another \$25,000 to Howard University. The A. F. of L. formally supported the campaign to outlaw segregated schools; and the Executive Council reacted to the Court de-

cision with a call for the Federal Government to appropriate \$1,000,000,000 to help the Southern states "modernize and democratize their school systems" through "tremendous expansion of inadequate school facilities." In addition to their specific concern for public education, it is probable that these labor leaders are coming to see how the whole Jim-Crow system weakens the trade-union movement, and also to appreciate the need for developing closer ties with the powerful liberation movement of the Negro people.

Fifth, the struggle to abolish segregated schools demonstrates the importance of the Negro liberation movement as a force for over-all democracy and peace.

McCarthy-fascism and preparations for imperialist war stand in direct conflict with the freedom goals of the Negro people. The recent Court decision was more than a triumph for Negro rights; it was a major victory in the whole broad fight for democracy and peace, in the fight against McCarthyism. This emphasizes the indispensable role of the Negro people's struggle in the whole effort to block war and fascism.

ROLE OF THE LEFT IN THE STRUGGLES WHICH LIE AHEAD

It is a long-standing tactic of the U.S. ruling class to adopt progressive measures in response to democratic pressures of the people, and then to nullify them in practice. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act, for ex-

ample, was not passed to curb the trusts, but to curb the anti-trust movement. The Fourteenth Amendment's suffrage guarantees to the Negro people have long been ignored by our Government; and Comrade Eugene Dennis' effort to invoke them before the un-American Committee landed him in prison for "contempt." It would be illusory not to expect that the federal courts, Congress and the executive will collaborate with the Dixiecrats in attempting to stymie any genuine implementation of the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools.

The "legal" rationale for such sabotage has already been outlined by a member of the law faculty of the University of Michigan, one Paul G. Kauper. He is said by *The Michigan Journalist* to argue that:

Nothing in the Constitution requires the states or the Federal Government to furnish public education. . . . Hence a state ostensibly could legally quit the field of education by allotting annual subsidies to parents, on condition they see to it that their children are educated, and sell its school properties to private educators who would operate their institutions on a racially segregated basis.

Further, in apparent recognition of the "danger" that the Southern masses will not permit abandonment of public education, the good professor points out:

A state might try to avoid the segregation problem by districting in such a way that Negroes will go to one

school, whites to another. "In the end," he said, "we will have a lot of that anyway," because many children living in Negro districts will continue to go to Negro schools by preference or because of convenience. . . .

The Court did not hold that white and black children must go to school together. . . . If such districting is done (so) it is a normal pattern based on proximity of the children to the schools it will probably be allowed (by the courts).*

The efficacy of Kauper's latter suggestion has been amply demonstrated in many urban communities of Northern states which "prohibit" school segregation by law. In New York City, for example, the Negro population is concentrated in the Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Morrisania and Jamaica areas as a direct result of Jim Crow housing restrictions; and many of the elementary and junior high schools in these areas are quite or almost entirely Negro in composition. Incidentally, much the same is true of schools for Puerto Rican children in the East Harlem ghetto. And so it is with Negro children in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and many other communities with large Negro populations, and with Mexican-American children in the Southwest.

Moreover, these Jim-Crow schools in the North are not solely the result of what New York City Superintendent of Schools William Jansen

seeks to justify as "natural segregation" (*Amsterdam News*, June 5, 1954). Rather, the effects of ghetto housing are aggravated by the deliberate practices of gerrymandering school districts and granting transfers-out to white children living in predominantly Negro districts. We may be sure that the Dixiecrats will seek to avail themselves of these effective techniques by which Northern cities have maintained Jim-Crow schools in spite of legal prohibitions and continual struggle by the Negro people.

Even if the Southern Bourbons are forced to enroll Negro and white children in common schools, they may be expected to resist to the last the integration of Negro and white teachers. For them to concede, in practice, the equality of white and Negro children would, in itself, seriously undermine the premises of white chauvinism; but for them to go farther and concede that *any* Negro could be a *teacher* of a white person—even of white pupils—would be a major blow to their theory of white superiority. Thus, whatever develops regarding children in the schools, we may expect strenuous efforts to keep Negro teachers from instructing white pupils. There is grave danger that in many areas of the South—as in Jeffersonville, Indiana, following the abolition of segregated schools several years ago—the Negro teachers will find themselves without jobs (*The New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 1954).

It is clear that the fight to abolish

* Reported by Arthur Krock in *The New York Times*, June 18, 1954.

segregated schools has only begun. Powerful and sustained people's struggles will be necessary to win progressive implementing decrees from the Supreme Court and actually to eliminate school segregation in the North as well as in the South.

It is also clear that the Negro people are girding for precisely such struggles; they are in no mood for temporizing. In response to the "Atlanta Declaration" issued by Southern Negro leaders at the May 22-23 conference sponsored by the N.A.A.C.P., for example, local delegations throughout the South are calling upon school authorities to take immediate steps to abolish school segregation, without waiting for the Supreme Court's directives some time next year. The slogan, "Integrate Now!", is emblazoned on the front pages of the Negro press; and it correctly reflects the dominant sentiments of the Negro masses and their leaders.

More than this, spokesmen of the Negro people are raising the demand for abolition of all other kinds of racial discrimination. The *Afro-American's* lead editorial on June 5th, for example, hailed the May 24th follow-up decision of the Supreme Court, proscribing segregation in low-rent public housing, city golf courses, municipal parks, public junior colleges and state universities; and then called for a concerted drive to eliminate segregation in public swimming pools, bath houses, drinking fountains, rest room facilities, transportation, voting facilities, ten-

nis courts, baseball and football fields, employment, jails, prisons and houses of correction. "The Supreme Court has assuredly made the job easier," it declared, "but the hard pull still lies ahead. Let's get on with the business."

The Negro people understand the Court decision in the segregated schools cases as a major breakthrough in the whole Jim-Crow system; and they are pressing for new and greater gains. As Comrade Hugh Bradley predicted last fall in *Next Steps in the Struggle for Negro Freedom*: "The next period ahead will witness momentous struggles of the Negro people for the abolition of the Jim-Crow system in the United States."

Victory in the next stages of the fight to abolish segregated schools will require massive support of the Negro people by the progressive white workers of our country, first of all in the trade unions, and especially in the South. Indeed, the whole labor-progressive movement will have to be mobilized in this struggle—including, in addition to the Negro people and the unions, the democratic organizations of tenants, P.T.A.'s and other community groups, churches, professional associations, writers and other artists, peace organizations, fraternal societies, Jewish people's organizations, other national groups, civil rights organizations, the progressive press, and all other sections of the population that can be won in the fight for democracy and peace.

This coalition of democratic forces should demand prompt and full integration of white and Negro schools in the South, and immediate measures to eliminate Jim Crow schools in the North. It should back up the A. F. of L.'s call for a billion-dollar program of federal aid to education to improve school facilities in the Southern states. It should also raise demands for other Negro-rights measures which can be won in the political climate created by the recent Court decisions—notably for an end to segregated housing, for F.E.P.C. legislation on all governmental levels, for fair employment practice clauses in government and trade union contracts, for the freedom of Mrs. Rosa Ingram, for new advances in Negro representation in the fall elections—indeed, all along the line. Candidates for election to public office in 1954 and 1956 should be pressed to declare their stand on these issues. Substantial financial contributions should be made to the Educational Equality Fund of the N.A.A.C.P.

Full and vigorous support of the Negro people's demands by the labor-progressive movement in the period ahead can guarantee the abolition of segregated schools as well as other big gains in the fight for Negro rights. It can also consolidate the Negro-Labor Alliance, and thus greatly strengthen the role of the Negro people as a major force in the over-all struggle for jobs, peace and democracy.

Any such mobilization of the labor-

progressive movement is impossible, however, without the active intervention of the Communist Party and the Left forces it directly influences. Hence, the tremendous opportunities opened up by the recent Supreme Court decisions pose a serious challenge to the vanguard role of the Communists. At the same time they call for self-critical analysis of the reasons our Party remained so largely on the sidelines during the initial stage of the fight to abolish segregated schools.

It is true, of course, that the vanguard role of the Communist Party in many past struggles for Negro rights has contributed markedly to the unity and militancy of the Negro liberation movement, and has helped to win important allies for the Negro people. Further, the struggles of our Party against fascism and war have done much to strengthen the broad people's movement for democracy and peace, and thus to help wrest Negro-rights concessions from our war-bound imperialist government. Even so, the fact remains that, aside from the activities of individual Communists here and there, our Party played no direct role in the fight to outlaw segregated schools. Moreover, if the Communist Party is to play its essential vanguard role in the Negro-rights struggles which lie ahead, we will have to uncover and root out the influences which kept us apart from this most important mass movement of the Negro people in recent decades.

I think we shall find the basic explanation in that general sectarian isolation of our Party from the working class and Negro masses which the Draft Program now under discussion seeks to correct. I think we shall also discover that certain deep-seated ideological weaknesses contributed especially to our isolation from the Jim Crow schools fight. Chief among them are: (1) strong and widespread negative attitudes toward struggles led by the Negro petty bourgeoisie coupled with over-estimation of the present stage in the development of the leading role of Negro workers; (2) underestimation of the political significance of the fight against segregated schools, probably stemming in part from our general tendency to neglect issues in the field of public education; and (3) failure to appreciate the important stakes of the Southern white masses and the labor movement as a whole in the fight to abolish segregated schools, with resultant underestimation of the extent to which they could be won as allies in the struggle.

There are, of course, other factors

—both subjective and objective—and it is extremely important that we examine and correct them all. Full discussion of the fight to abolish segregated schools should be undertaken throughout the Communist Party. Organizational steps should be taken to end the isolation of our Negro cadres from the mass organizations of the Negro people. Concrete programs of action around Jim Crow schools and related issues should be planned and launched in local communities. And our Party should greatly intensify its struggle against white chauvinism—for this remains the chief ideological barrier to full participation of the white working class masses in the fight for Negro democratic rights.

The Draft Program of our Party—*The American Way to Jobs, Peace and Democracy*—declares that “the fight for the liberation of the Negro nation, for the rights of all the Negro people, is an integral part of the fight for democracy, for peace, for the rights and living standards of labor and all the people.” And so it truly is. In the words of the *Afro-Americans*: “Let’s get on with the business!”