

A Theoretical and Political Magazine of Scientific Socialism

Editor: V. J. Jerome

The 46th Annual Convention of the NAACP

By Doxey A. Wilkerson

THE RECENT 46TH ANNUAL CONVENTION of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demonstrated, once again, that this organization constitutes the vital center of the Negro people's movement today. Its democratic program for Negro rights and on other social and economic questions is probably more advanced than that of any other mass organization in which the Left plays so modest a role. Its policy of independent political action coincides with the requirements for breaking through the G.O.P.-Dixiecrat road-block to progressive foreign and domestic policy. Its serious quest for allies, especially in the labor movement, will help to consolidate the democratic people's coalition for 1956. And its militant, fighting spirit reflects the mood of its quarter-million members and the Negro people as a whole.

ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION

Approximately 800 people attended the N.A.A.C.P. Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, June 21 to 26. On the fourth day the Credentials Committee reported 479 voting delegates and 286 alternates, observers and fraternal delegates; others arrived toward the end of the week.

There were 138 voting delegates and 136 others from the Middle Atlantic and New England states; the Mid-Western Regions sent 134 representatives; the Far West Region sent 52; and the Southern Regions sent 295, or 39% of the total. Approximately one-half of the 235 community branches, youth councils and college chapters represented at the Convention are located in Southern regions.

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This relatively high representation from the Southern states reflects the Association's widespread organization in the South. Some 458 (61%) of N.A.A.C.P.'s 780 community branches, 121 of its 241 youth councils, and 28 of its 64 college chapters are in the South.

Reflecting N.A.A.C.P.'s high prestige in Negro life, this Annual Convention, like its predecessors, brought together an outstanding and varied group of prominent Negro leaders. First, of course, were the national officers of the Association itself. Also in attendance, either as observers or participating in the program, were Federal Judge William Hastie, labor leaders A. Philip Randolph and George Weaver, Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company executive Earl B. Dickerson, *Afro-American* publisher Carl Murphy—to whom the Association presented the 40th Spingarn Medal—*Black Dispatch* publisher Roscoe C. Dunjee, and former Richmond, Virginia, City Councilman Oliver Hill.

A score or more elected and appointed Negro officials were present. Important white public officials also paid their respects to the Convention. It was welcomed at the outset by the Mayor of Atlantic City. The Spingarn Medal presentation Friday evening was made by the Governor of New Jersey. The closing session was addressed by the Vice President of the United States. All sessions were held in the Atlantic City High School.

It was a serious convention. Al-

though practically devoid of dramatic or "exciting" moments, it was notable for the dead-in-earnest concern of most delegates, especially those from the South, to grapple with the concrete problems they face back home. And out of it all there emerged a formulation of policy and program which underscores the key importance of N.A.A.C.P. in the fight for civil rights, civil liberties, economic security and peace, and which re-emphasizes the Association's great potential for helping to consolidate the Negro-Labor Alliance in a program of independent political action.

CIVIL RIGHTS

This Convention reaffirmed the 44th Annual Convention's slogan of "Free by '63," resolving "that the goal for complete elimination of all vestiges of second-class citizenship under which Negro Americans still suffer must be accomplished by not later than the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1963." Recognizing that "there remain years of intensive toil and labor, together with financial sacrifice and exposure of many of our workers and leaders to personal danger," the Convention declared: "We shall meet these challenges with resolve and determination, tempered and fortified with the knowledge that our cause is just and our methods legal and our devotion unyielding."

The key-note address by Dr. Tobias developed this "Free by '63" theme, listing some twenty specific civil rights "achievements" since the campaign began in 1953—"all due," he claimed, "to the success of N.A.A.C.P.'s legal and legislative program and publicity." Emphasizing that everything the Association stands for "we seek as loyal, law-abiding citizens," he called for continuation of the organization's "stubborn fight." Tobias reported that the million - dollars - a - year - for - ten - years Freedom Fund campaign went over-the-top last year. He proposed (and the Convention later established) a special Walter White Memorial Fund, with every member raising or giving an extra dollar per year to carry on the freedom crusade.

To the end of implementing the "Free by '63" slogan, the Convention defined nine specific civil rights objectives to be fought for in the period ahead. They include: (1) "equality of job opportunity" through passage and enforcement of federal and state F.E.P. laws; (2) abolition of the poll tax and protection of the right to register for voting; (3) a stronger Civil Rights Section of the Department of Justice; (4) an end to discrimination and segregation in public and private housing; (5) "Speedy and diligent implementation of the recent Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregation in public schools, and integration of teachers on the basis of qualifications"; (6) "legislation to

guarantee complete access to public accommodations, transportation and recreational facilities on an unsegregated basis"; (7) unsegregated hospital and health service; (8) "protection of the safety and security of all persons without discrimination"; and (9) "initiation of a program of education in race relations by federal, state and local government agencies."

The civil rights issue which dominated the Convention from beginning to end was, of course, the problem of implementing the Supreme Court ruling against segregated schools. Next in importance were the fight for the vote in the South and the struggle against Jim Crow housing.

Spokesmen for the National Office, especially Thurgood Marshall and Channing Tobias, argued forcefully against the idea that the recent May 31 decree of the Supreme Court tends to undermine last year's May 17 decision, and to rally the delegates for struggle to translate the Court rulings into life. The May 31 decree, contended Tobias, confirms the May 17 decision, and "does not deviate one inch." The two rulings are a unit, said Marshall, insisting that they must be read together. They proclaim, he continued, that school segregation is against the law; that anyone requiring segregation is violating the Constitution and is open to criminal and civil prosecution.

With a powerful polemic against those who counsel "gradualism"

("Don't tell me to 'take it easy!"), Marshall outlined the Association's program for implementing the Supreme Court ruling. Each local branch in a segregated school area is to file a petition with the school board immediately, requesting that it act to implement the Court decision, with periodic follow-up to determine what steps are being taken. The branch is also to conduct an educational campaign in the community, and to solicit the support of parents, churches, trade unions, civic groups and prominent individuals. "Good faith compliance" by school officials is to be judged by whether they (1) recognize the principle of desegregation now, (2) plan now some implementing steps to begin this fall, (3) take some concrete steps toward integration this fall, and (4) complete the process of desegregation by September, 1956. As stated in the Directive to Branches adopted at the Regional Emergency Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 4, "If no plans are announced or no steps toward desegregation taken by the time school begins this fall, 1955, the time for a law suit has arrived," and the issue will be turned over to the legal department for proceedings in the court.

Questions and discussion from the floor revealed that the delegates were fully in accord with the National Office approach to this question, and that local branches throughout the South are now in motion to carry it out. They are meeting hosts of concrete problems, and posed them

for answers at the Convention. Especially acute, it seems, are problems facing Negro teachers—firings in some areas where schools are being integrated, contracts with 30-day termination clauses, and a wide variety of threats and efforts at intimidation by school officials.

The comprehensive resolution on education adopted by the Convention incorporates explicitly the approach outlined by Special Counsel Marshall to school desegregation in the South. It also includes a section calling on "the northern branches [to] pursue with equal vigor the complete eradication of all forms of discrimination in schools."

It was clear at the Convention—and has been further emphasized by National Office and local branch activities since—that the N.A.A.C.P. is determined to maintain a vigorous offensive on this segregated schools question. It was also clear then—and is even more evident now—that the job of coping with the die-hard segregationist resistance is, indeed, "going to be tough." Moreover, despite the understandable public statements of N.A.A.C.P. leaders to the contrary, the May 31 decrees of the Supreme Court are of but limited help in the fight for early implementation of last year's May 17 decision. The more recent Court order surely represents no surrender of principle; but its failure to set a deadline for integration certainly does represent a tactical retreat—and one which greatly strengthens the delaying maneuvers and sabotage

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of the Dixiecrats. None knows this better than the leaders of N.A.A.C.P.; and if there were any doubt, it must have been dispelled by the post-Convention decisions of the Federal District Courts in the South Carolina and Virginia cases. The fight to abolish segregated schools will require, if it is to win, the full power of the Association and very substantial support from a wide range of allies.

The fight for the right to vote in the South loomed large in the discussion of several workshops. Here, again, there was impressive participation by Southern delegates. They cited a wide range of concrete problems—refusal to accept poll tax payments from Negroes, arbitrary “disqualification” of Negro citizens by registrars, threats and violence directed against Negro voters—as in the recent murder of Rev. George W. Lee in Belzoni, Mississippi—obstacles to voting in the (now illegal) “white primary,” and many others. They also reported significant achievements—in breaking through many barriers and increasing the number of Negro voters, in winning important footholds in the Democratic Party organization, and in the election of Negroes to state and local public office. It was clear from the discussion that the right-to-vote movement is one of the most powerful civil rights struggles under way in the South, and that local branches of N.A.A.C.P. are very actively involved in its development.

This question was dealt with form-

ally in a resolution which pledges the Association “to use all legal means to destroy restrictions and practices which adversely affect the right to register and vote.” The resolution also declares: “We believe that we can and must have three million colored voters in the South by 1956.”

There was spirited participation also in the workshop on Problems in Housing, — especially by delegates from northern industrial areas. Moreover, the technical experts leading the discussion displayed a mastery of the problems which delegates found very helpful.

The Convention resolution on housing “reiterates our policy that members of all minority groups should be able to live in the place and location of their choice and economic status”; condemns discriminatory practices of “real-estate brokers, home builders, banks and other lending institutions”; raises a number of concrete demands, directed to federal housing agencies. It is evident that here is a major civil rights issue around which N.A.A.C.P. branches are conducting widespread struggles.

POLITICAL ACTION

This was a highly political Convention; and repeated calls for independent political action were sounded throughout—from the keynote speech of Channing Tobias to the concluding address by Roy Wilkins.

During recent years N.A.A.C.P.

conventions have been the occasion for leaders of the Association to laud the current President of the United States. At St. Louis in 1953, for example, the then Executive Secretary Walter White called for complete confidence in and support of the Eisenhower Administration, hailing the Chief Executive almost as the Great White Father from whom all civil rights blessings flow. It was much the same at last year's Dallas Convention, meeting in the wake of the historic May 17 victory in the Supreme Court; and so it had been at previous conventions during the Truman Administration.

But a radical change was registered at Atlantic City. There the main spokesmen of the Association very deliberately hurled sharp criticisms at President Eisenhower because of his expressed opposition to the N.A.A.C.P.-sponsored anti-discrimination amendment which Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. had had incorporated in the National Reserves Bill then pending in the House, and to similar amendments proposed for pending federal-aid-to-education bills.

Dr. Tobias, for example, declared—with considerable emotion—that if the President wants to criticize these so-called “riders,” “let him put his finger on those [*i.e.*, the Dixiecrats] who cause the riders; we won't accept the criticism until he does.” Thurgood Marshall rejected the charge that N.A.A.C.P.'s campaign for the anti-discrimination amendments is “holding up the defense ef-

fort,” pointing out that the rabid segregationists prefer “no army” and “no education” if operated on a basis of racial equality, and demanding that critics “put the responsibility where it belongs.” Clarence Mitchell, Director of the Association's Washington Bureau, replying to a question from the floor about the President's opposition to the “riders,” exclaimed: “Not even the Chief Executive of the United States has the right to strike below the belt—and that's what was done!” And Roy Wilkins countered Vice President Nixon's call for reliance upon “education and persuasion” with the charge that both the Democrats and the Republicans are betraying the fight for civil rights, adding that if the Republicans, seeking allies in the South, “continue to talk like Dixiecrats, and vote like Dixiecrats, they will not have to infiltrate the South, it will have taken them over.”

This anti-Eisenhower mood was shared very generally by the delegates, as was clear from their comments from the floor and in the corridors. It was further deepened by the President's inept greeting to the Convention, calling for “perseverence, knowledge and forbearance,” and expressing the hope “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.” One suspects that reports of the Convention's critical attitude toward the President were transmitted quickly

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to the political mentors of the White House, resulting in the mid-Convention announcement that Vice President Nixon, who had turned down an invitation to speak, would be able to appear, after all.

As noted in the concluding address by Roy Wilkins, sharp criticism at this Convention was directed, not only at Eisenhower and the G.O.P., but likewise at the Democrats. The very significant address by Clarence Mitchell, for example, began with the statement that "Republicans and Democrats have united in a bi-partisan program of smothering civil rights legislation in the Eighty-Fourth Congress." He challenged the effort of Democrats "to hide behind the South when explaining their failures on civil rights," pointing out that New York's Representative Celler, West Virginia's Senator Kilgore and Washington's Senator Magnuson all head committees which are sitting on civil rights bills—and that "northern and western Representatives and Senators outnumber southern members on the Senate and House Labor Committees where FEPC is bottled up."

In order "to meet the present stalemate that we face in Congress," Mitchell called for "each state conference president to appoint two persons at this conference who will work directly with the Washington Bureau in getting the support of individual members of Congress for civil rights." It is "imperative," he declared, to "organize a system of warning so perfect that overnight we

can blanket the country with information on what individual members of Congress are doing about civil rights bills or amendments that are either in committee or on the floor."

This was the setting in which the Convention adopted its very fine resolution on Political Action. Criticizing the President and Congress for "betraying" the fight for civil rights—"neither of the major political parties has kept a single platform pledge on civil rights legislation"—the resolution endorses the lobbying apparatus proposed by Clarence Mitchell and calls "upon the National Office and Board of Directors to use the most dramatic and effective methods with the second session of the 84th Congress to bring civil rights legislation before the Congress for passage and before the conventions of the major political parties for consideration in the 1956 platforms."

In short, the Convention, very forcefully, declared the N.A.A.C.P.'s political independence from the Eisenhower Administration—a big advance over previous years; and it called for concerted pressure now on both major political parties for progressive legislation—which is precisely the best policy it could adopt in preparation for the national elections of next year.

LABOR AND INDUSTRY

N.A.A.C.P. is probably more highly conscious than any other Negro mass organization of the decisive importance of trade-union support in

the fight for Negro rights; and this fact was demonstrated anew at its 46th Annual Convention.

The Association's emphasis in the fight for integrated schools, until recently centered on legal battles in the courts, is now being shifted, of necessity, to mass struggles in the local communities. Thus it is that many speakers from the platform and delegates from the floor expressed the need for developing allies of the Association in this and other aspects of its fight for civil rights—the churches, miscellaneous civic groups, and especially the trade unions.

This recognition of the need for labor support was reflected in Labor Secretary Hill's pre-Convention letter to many trade unions, inviting them to send fraternal delegates to participate in the workshop on Organizing Labor and the N.A.A.C.P. It was spelled out even more clearly in his prepared speech on "The Role of Organized Labor in Effecting School Integration." Hill characterized the unions as "a significant power group" to aid in the fight for desegregation, stressing their importance in "helping to resolve conflicts and tensions within the general community." He urged trade unions to issue public declarations in support of school integration, especially in the South, and "to invoke disciplinary action against members who take part in public demonstrations against desegregation."

The Convention resolution on Labor and Industry is even more fully

expressive of N.A.A.C.P.'s very positive orientation toward the labor movement; and it reflects a high degree of maturity on this question. The opening section "reaffirms" the Association's "support of democratic trade unionism and the principle of collective bargaining," pointing out that "hundreds of thousands of Negro workers [more accurately, nearly two million] belong to labor unions in every part of the country." It goes on to list the many gains labor has won through collective bargaining and declares: "Negro workers and the entire Negro community have directly benefitted from these victories won by organized labor, and, therefore, the N.A.A.C.P. vigorously supports the purposes of organized labor, including the union shop, in a union with open membership and non-discriminatory policies." Then follows this truly advanced call for the necessary two-way approach to building the Negro-labor alliance:

We urge our branches and state conferences wherever possible to seek the support of responsible trade unions for measures that we favor, and in turn give our support to such measures supported by organized labor as are consistent with our policy and program.

The second section of the Labor and Industry resolution is on the A. F. of L.-C.I.O. merger. It "endorses the historic merger agreement"; asserts that "a strong and united labor movement represents a

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powerful weapon in the struggle to end racial discrimination in the training and employment of Negro workers"; and calls "on the new Federation to launch an intensive drive to organize the unorganized in the South especially."

The resolution also expresses "gratification that the recommendations of the A. F. of L.-C.I.O. Joint Merger Committee contain as a principle of merger between the two great bodies of organized labor a clear and forthright statement recognizing the equal status of all minority groups in the new Federation." This endorsement of the anti-discrimination clause in the early Joint Committee agreement—pointedly failing even to mention the seriously watered-down provisions of the more recent Draft Constitution — undoubtedly reflects the Association's anxiety lest the discriminatory policies of certain A. F. of L. unions be carried over into the merger. Leaders of the Association apparently wished to avoid a direct Convention criticism of the proposed merger constitution; but their concern is clearly implied in the resolution's declaration that: "The N.A.A. C.P. firmly believes that there must be no place in the merged Federation or its affiliates for 'segregated locals,' 'colored auxiliaries,' 'lily-white' clauses in union constitutions, or wage differentials and separate lines of progression based on race."

The third section of the resolution, headed "Non-Cooperation with Communist-Controlled Unions," reaffirms the Association's "official policy that

no branch or state conference of the N.A.A.C.P. will endorse, participate in, or cooperate with Communist-controlled unions or with unions dominated by underworld racketeering elements." It makes clear that reference is "particularly . . . to those international unions expelled from organized labor for being under Communist control or under racketeering control *and still under that control**"; and asserts that support given to or accepted from such unions "will not help but rather will hinder our efforts to win adoption of our program." Several delegates expressed vigorous opposition to this statement of policy; but it was adopted by an overwhelming majority—and without any really substantial debate.

As reported out by the Resolutions Committee, the wording of this ban on cooperation with the independent unions expelled from C.I.O. is identical with that of the 1954 Convention resolution—with two significant exceptions. *First*, this year's resolution, by adding the qualification ". . . *and still under that [i.e., Communist] control,*" seemingly opens the door to N.A.A.C.P. cooperation with formerly banned unions which have effected mergers with other, politically more acceptable, internationals. *Second*, the 1954 Convention resolution stated that "the prohibition against working with Communist-controlled unions shall also include the National Ne-

* Emphasis here added.

gro Labor Council, because it is completely Communist-dominated. . . ."; but this item was left out of the Resolution Committee's report at the 1955 Convention. Upon being queried about this omission, the Chairman of the Committee explained that it was deliberate, based on "advice of counsel"; and when pressed for further explanation, he stated that the provision might be construed by the courts as "libelous." On motion from the floor, and again with only inconsequential protest, the prohibition against cooperation with N.N.L.C. was incorporated in the resolution.

Thus, N.A.A.C.P. again embraced as its own the C.I.O. policy of opposition to the expelled independent unions. In so doing, it once more endorsed the Big Lie now incorporated in the Brownell-Butler provisions of the Communist Control Act, about which even the anti-Communist sections of the labor movement are becoming increasingly concerned.

It is doubtful that a score of the voting delegates at the Convention could name the unions proscribed by this resolution, or that they had any real interest in the trade-union policy struggle which lies at the root of this question. They voted for the resolution because it was proposed by leaders in whom they have confidence, and because they had no special reason for opposing it—especially in the anti-Communist political climate of this period. The leaders of the Association were prob-

ably motivated chiefly by a desire to hold firm their close relations with C.I.O.—even at the expense of a truly independent policy for N.A.A.C.P. But it seems to this observer that a dispute which arises *within* the ranks of labor and which does not involve issues of Negro rights should be fought out in the labor movement, not in the organizations of the Negro people. The N.A.A.C.P. would be well advised to end its intervention in this intra-labor conflict, because such intervention represents only a drag on the whole Negro freedom movement.

In other sections, this omnibus Labor and Industry resolution "strongly deplores" company efforts to use Negro workers as strike-breakers; calls for government action to relieve the plight of migrant workers; endorses the \$1.25 minimum wage, with coverage broadened to include agricultural and sales workers; urges labor and governmental agencies to help eliminate discrimination in apprenticeship and other job-training facilities; and demands "fuller employment of Negro and non-white artists, technicians and all other personnel" in radio, television and films.

The resolution also advocates a "comprehensive system of social insurance," with the inclusion of professional workers in the old-age benefit program; calls for amendment of state unemployment compensation laws "so that they will fit into the guaranteed annual wage pattern"; and demands "that President

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Eisenhower take effective steps through the Government Contract Compliance Division to stop" discrimination against Negro workers in many federal projects—especially the plants operated by the Atomic Energy Commisison—and in many private industrial plants holding government defense contracts. Further, it condemns anti-union "Right-to-Work" laws, and also "state laws restricting the freedom of political action by organized labor"; calls on all N.A.A.C.P. branches and state conferences to help implement existing state and city F.E.P.C. laws; and endorses the Union Label Campaign of organized labor.

This comprehensive Labor and Industry resolution, with its strong endorsement of the labor movement and its economic program, was presented to the Convention by delegate Charles Webber, Assistant Director of the C.I.O. Community Service Division. It reflects the growing ties N.A.A.C.P. has been developing with labor during the past decade, and the increasing participation of trade unionists in the life of the Association.

There were many Negro and a few white trade unionists present at the Convention. They included, in addition to Randolph and Weaver, such national labor leaders as William Oliver of Auto, Boyd Wilson of Steel, Asbury Howard of Mine-Mill, John Dial of Amalgamated, and Louis Manning of Transport, together with scores of representatives from local unions. The *Amsterdam*

News (July 9), for example, lists 47 representatives of 20 unions in the New York area alone. A handful of these labor leaders were official delegates; but most of them came as observers or fraternal delegates, and hence did not have access to Convention committees or to the floor. They participated in the big and vital Workshop on Organizing Labor and N.A.A.C.P., which was chaired by New Jersey C.I.O. Civil Rights Director Arthur Chapin; but they did not emerge as a force actively influencing policy in other aspects of the Convention program.

Recent annual conventions of N.A.A.C.P. have been addressed by top white leaders of the labor movement—for example, Patrick Gorman in 1953, and James Carey in 1954; but there were no such leaders at Atlantic City. A. F. of L. Secretary - Treasurer William F. Schnitzler was scheduled to address the public mass meeting Wednesday evening, along with Thurgood Marshall; but he did not appear. Moreover, no announcement was made to the delegates explaining his absence.

Thus, this Convention revealed somewhat of a contrast between the strongly pro-labor policy and program of N.A.A.C.P. and the limited direct participation of labor leaders in the affairs of the Association. This may be due, in part, to hesitancy on the part of N.A.A.C.P. leaders to open up channels which would contribute to more than a "fraternal" relationship with leading trade

unionists. Unquestionably, however, the chief reason is labor's continuing underestimation of the importance of building the Negro-labor alliance.

CIVIL LIBERTIES AND FOREIGN POLICY

There was very little discussion at Atlantic City of the Cold War erosion of the Bill of Rights or of the struggle for peace; but the Convention did adopt, with little or no debate, a series of significant resolutions on these questions. The policies asserted are, for the most part, progressive; but there are also important limitations—and they operate to weaken the Association's advanced position in the fight for Negro democratic rights.

There are several notably progressive policy statements in the civil liberties field. The resolution on Academic Freedom, for example, opposes "any and all efforts to suppress freedom of thought and objective learning," and particularly condemns "the discharge of teachers on the basis of charges by 'nameless informers.'" The resolution on the Federal Security-Loyalty Program demands "that all persons accused of being a security risk shall have the right to know the nature of the charges against them, the source of the charges and the right to be confronted by the accuser and to cross-examine the witnesses against them," and condemns as "odious" the Federal Government's use of "paid professional informers."

The resolution on Congressional Investigations asserts that "many innocent persons have been charged with treasonable or subversive conduct and given no opportunity to know the evidence against them or to defend themselves or their reputation with the consequent loss of their employment," and calls "on the Congress and the legislatures of the several states to enact rules of fair play" for the conduct of such investigations. The resolution on the McCarran-Walter Anti-Immigration Act calls "for revision . . . to eliminate the national origins quota system and other racist-based provisions, and to liberalize its procedures in accordance with fair and equal treatment for all immigrants and prospective immigrants."

The Convention was silent, however, on the civil liberties violations entailed by the Smith Act, the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950, and the Communist Control Act of 1954. Moreover, in formal endorsement of the Big Lie which operates as the premise for precisely those violations of civil liberties which the Association condemns, the Convention again adopted, without discussion, its resolution reaffirming "our rejection of Communism as an anti-democratic way of life," and calling on all branches "to be constantly alert against attempts of Communists and their sympathizers . . . to infiltrate and gain control of any units of our organization."

The Convention also shied away from certain key issues on which

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with little danger of appearing "too progressive," it might well have advanced its position on the question of civil liberties. For example, the Supreme Court declaration that the right to travel abroad is a "natural right" was handed down during the early days of the Convention, and has subsequently been used by several Negro newspapers as the basis for editorial demands that Paul Robeson be granted a passport. Also, shortly before the Convention, Federal Judge William H. Hastie, a member of N.A.A.C.P.'s National Board of Directors, wrote an historic dissenting opinion which exposes the fraud inherent in the imprisonment of Communists for alleged violation of the Smith Act. But the Convention ignored both of these questions; and at the same time it gave comfort to the main enemies of civil liberties—always the most rabid racists—by reaffirming its policies of "Anti-Communism" and "Non-Cooperation with Communist-Controlled Unions."

Even so, it is important to note that the proceedings of this Convention were markedly free of red-baiting, either from the platform or from the floor. In sharp contrast to the 1954 Dallas Convention—which featured virulent anti-Communism from the keynote address of Channing Tobias to the concluding speeches of Ralph Bunche and Walter White—not one national leader of the Association made a red-baiting speech at Atlantic City; and there was extremely little of it from the

delegates. This fact, coupled with the Resolution Committee's deliberate omission of a recommendation for non-cooperation with the National Negro Labor Council, suggests that the N.A.A.C.P. leadership may be taking a second look at the contradiction between its generally advanced position on civil liberties and its endorsement of the Big Lie of anti-Communism.

The Convention resolutions on foreign policy, except on the colonial question and related issues, tend to lag behind the advanced positions taken on most other questions. The statement on Foreign Economic Aid urges "larger appropriations for economic as compared with military aid." The resolution on Apartheid in South Africa condemns "the dangerous racist policies of the Union of South Africa," and calls "on our government to press for prompt action by the United Nations on the complaints which have been brought against the Union of South Africa on behalf of both Africans and Asians."

The resolution on Peace and Imperialism notes the "millions of Africans . . . still denied self-government and equality of political status," and calls "on our government to urge our allies to move swiftly in the direction of complete self-government and independence for all their colonies." Included in the resolution is the statement that "the recent Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya dramatically highlight the dangers inherent in longer suppressing the legi-

timate grievances of the African populace." This formulation represents a significant shift from the 45th Convention's equal condemnation of both "the extreme methods of the Mau Mau" and "the terroristic methods used against the Mau Mau," an issue over which there was heated debate and a very close vote at Dallas.

The resolution on the Bandung Conference commends the position of the Asian-African Conference "for its declaration to the world that the economic, political and social rights of Asian and African people must be fully recognized," but also—with a glaring distortion of the Bandung Declaration—"for its opposition to both western and communistic imperialism and colonialism." On motion by a delegate from the floor, there was incorporated in this resolution a recommendation to the National Board of Directors that the Association send an official observer to next year's Asian-African Conference in Cairo, Egypt.

The resolution on the United Nations salutes that international organization for its "decade of progress in welding the nations of the world into one form designed to eradicate the evils of war," and particularly commends "the economic and social role of the UN's specialized agencies . . ." It expresses the need, however, for "speedier action by the United Nations in the implementation of the human rights provisions contained in its charter."

Finally, there was a resolution on Peace and Collective Security, which gives qualified endorsement to the "power blocs" and "positions of strength" policy of the State Department.

In response to a motion from the floor, the Convention incorporated in this resolution a greeting to the "Big Four" Conference scheduled for late July, together with a call for negotiations there to consolidate peace.

As with certain key questions in the civil liberties field, the Convention did not discuss or take any action on such concrete issues in the fight for peace as the situation around Formosa, the seating of China in the United Nations, the unification of Germany or the banning of nuclear weapons.

One gets the impression that the N.A.A.C.P. is following a "cautious" and rather opportunist policy in these fields. Whereas the Association asserts a bold and independent position in the fight for civil rights—which it properly regards as its main business—it acts with seeming deference to the Eisenhower Administration on questions of civil liberty and foreign policy, especially the latter. Where special "Negro interests" are directly involved, N.A.A.C.P. tends to assert advanced policies, even critical of the Administration. But on many other "hot" issues it tends to remain silent, or to make general gestures of obeisance to the powers that be—largely "for the record."

A POLITICAL ESTIMATE

The 46th Annual Convention of N.A.A.C.P. met in the context of political developments on the world and domestic scenes which profoundly affect the welfare of our country as a whole and of the Negro people in particular. In what ways were these developments reflected in the Atlantic City Convention? How shall we appraise the N.A.A.C.P. as a force in the important political struggles which lie immediately ahead? What tasks are entailed for the labor-progressive movement as a whole?

In the *first* place, it is clear that N.A.A.C.P. is determined to press the fight for Negro democratic rights in a big way, especially around the schools question, jobs, housing, and the right to vote in the South. Moreover, while continuing to rely heavily upon its talented lawyers and the courts, the Association is giving important new emphasis to organized legislative action focused on Congress and to mass people's struggles in the local communities. The further development of its program along these lines will surely enhance the effectiveness of N.A.A.C.P. as, without question, the foremost civil rights organization of the Negro people.

Second, the growth of N.A.A.C.P. membership seems to lag considerably behind its potentialities and needs, especially when one considers the dynamic program, the mounting prestige and the difficult tasks reflected at this Convention. The current membership of around 250,000

is very substantial; but it is little more than half the total of a decade ago, and the decline is only partially explained by the increase of the membership fee.

It would seem to be quite possible to build an N.A.A.C.P. of 1,000,000 or more members under the objective conditions of this period; but to do so will require a more thoroughly democratic policy in the conduct of the Association's affairs than was reflected at the Convention. The rules of procedure, for example, seriously limited participation from the floor, with but little of that full and rounded discussion and debate essential for maximum understanding of the Association's program and enthusiasm for building the organization. This Convention, like its predecessors, was tightly controlled from the top.

In this connection, there were many evidences at the Convention that the development of youth work is being seriously neglected—if not actively discouraged—by leaders of the Association. Yet, considering the increasing ferment among young people on a wide range of social questions, there is no doubt that N.A.A.C.P., with little effort, could build a vital and extensive network of youth councils and college chapters, and thus greatly stimulate the growth of the Association and enhance its effectiveness generally.

N.A.A.C.P. can be built into a much larger and far more powerful civil rights organization; and the tasks it now faces urgently require

that this be done. The main thing needed, in the opinion of this observer, is for leaders of the Association to unleash the initiative of its many members and supporters below, and to rally them in truly mass struggles for the achievement of its goals.

Third, the Convention registered a radical and very important shift of the Association away from support of the Eisenhower Administration and toward a more independent course in domestic affairs.

Certainly, the Atlantic City Convention revealed a definite stiffening of the Association's attitude toward the President and the G.O.P.; and it was accompanied by sharp criticism of the compromising northern Democrats in Congress. There was no clear indication of the present orientation of N.A.A.C.P. leaders toward the coming national elections; but if they implement the Convention's call for vigorous independent political action during the next fifteen months, they will surely contribute much to the electoral strength of the democratic forces in 1956.

Fourth, the Convention reaffirmed and in some respects strengthened the Association's already progressive policy on civil liberties—especially around the security-loyalty question and the Government's use of paid informers; and it made some slight steps forward on the question of foreign policy—notably in relation to the Asian-African Conference and the Geneva meeting of the "Big

Four."

The continuing serious limitations of the Association's policy in these fields must be understood chiefly as a reflection of the present relations of forces in our country. On the question of "anti-Communism," for example, it would have been unrealistic to suppose that any explicit change of position could be registered at Atlantic City. Although the Negro people, because of their own oppression, do tend to be more sensitive than the general population to all kinds of undemocratic measures, still, given today's political climate, we could hardly expect the N.A.A.C.P. now to undertake a task which even the labor movement thus far eschews.

Fifth, the Atlantic City Convention re-emphasized the fact that N.A.A.C.P. is the key to building the Negro-labor alliance. Not only did the Convention call for labor's help in the fight for Negro rights; it also endorsed practically all of labor's current economic demands and defended labor's right to engage in independent political action. When one considers, further, that C.I.O.'s Walter Reuther is a member of the Association's National Board of Directors, that there is an increasingly active Labor Department in the National Office, that the two-years-old Labor and Industry Committees are beginning to play a vital role in the local branches, and that scores of unions consider it important to send fraternal delegates to the Annual Convention, it is probable that no

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people's organization in America, Negro or white, has so conscious and organized a relationship with the labor movement as does the N.A.A.C.P. Here, surely, is the most advanced expression of the Negro-labor alliance on the current scene.

It is clear that the Association is eager further to develop its relations with labor—as, indeed, it must. The fond reformist conceit that integration can be achieved through the good graces of the ruling class has been dealt some shattering blows in the recent period; and the leaders of N.A.A.C.P.—as is beginning to be true of other Negro people's organizations—are forced to look more and more to the working class for support. In this quest for allies in the labor movement, they will also find it necessary, in time, to reappraise their relations with the Left as a part of the working class.

Sixth, the Convention highlighted the big opportunity now before the labor-progressive movement to cement its ties with the whole Negro people through closer cooperation with the key and influential N.A.A.C.P. There are many concrete ways in which white and Negro progressives, especially those in the trade unions, can contribute to this end.

They can help to build the membership of the Association in the ranks of the unions. It is reported, for example, that one Negro trade unionist in the New York area recruited more than 300 new N.A.A.C.P. members during the re-

cent membership campaign of his branch. His role could well be emulated by hundreds of trade unionists throughout the country.

They can help to develop the N.A.A.C.P. Labor and Industry Committees into even more vital and influential units, and thereby to involve the Association increasingly in direct cooperative relations with the trade unions.

They can encourage their unions to make financial contributions to the Association's Freedom Fund, and to take out Life Memberships for union officials.

They can influence their unions to give active support to the legislative demands of the Association, and especially to cooperate with local branches in the fight for school integration, for non-discrimination in housing, and for the right to vote in the South.

The most important task progressives in the unions can now undertake is to win trade union support for the Atlantic City Convention's call on the coming merged labor Federation "to launch an intensive drive to organize the unorganized in the South." Nothing could contribute more during this period to strengthen labor's ties with the whole Negro people than for the new Federation to carry through a massive campaign to organize many millions of southern white and Negro workers. Nor is there any other single task which could now contribute more toward building the national trade-union movement and strength-

ening the entire democratic coalition.

One of the main historic tasks confronting our nation is to democratize the South. Here is the key area of Big Business super-exploitation undermining the living standards of the whole country. Here is the main center of legislative attacks upon the labor movement. Here is the ready-made base of pro-fascist, pro-war political reaction. Here is the core of white-supremacist oppression of the Negro people. Here are the disfranchised millions of white and Negro citizens whose votes are essential to effect a progressive change in the political life of the United States.

Truly large-scale trade-union organization in the South would seriously weaken the whole rotten structure of the Wall Street-Dixiecrat alliance. It would enormously strengthen the influence of labor in American life, and greatly advance the civil rights goals of the Negro people. Progressives in the labor movement should do everything they can to influence the A. F. of L.-C.I.O. merged Federation to undertake and fight through the job which C.I.O.'s ill-fated "Operation Dixie" abandoned nearly ten years ago. This is the most fundamental task of labor and the Negro people that was highlighted in Atlantic City.

Finally, in the light of develop-

ments revealed by this analysis, one must conclude with an over-all positive estimate of the 46th Annual Convention of the N.A.A.C.P.

The Convention did reveal significant weaknesses in N.A.A.C.P. policy and program, especially in its continuing "anti-Communism" and its reluctance to tackle certain very important, concrete issues in the fight for peace and freedom. Notable also in this regard is the Association's continuing failure to develop any program on the basic land question in the South. These limitations flow in large measure, from the reformist ideology which dominates the middle-class leadership of the Association. The necessary corrective lies in developing a stronger base of active trade unionists in the organization, together with much more substantial support of its program by the labor-progressive movement.

There can be no doubt that in the context of the changing political scene, and given much more substantial support by the labor movement—a task for which progressives in the unions have a special responsibility—the N.A.A.C.P. will continue to move forward as an increasingly powerful force in the fight for the civil rights of the Negro people and also in the broader struggle for democracy and peace. The Atlantic City Convention made important contributions to this end.

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