

ADDRESS OF A. PHILIP RANDOLPH AT LABOR DINNER
FIFTY-FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE,
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, JUNE 24, 1960

In behalf of the officers and members of the Negro American Labor Council
I want to salute the officers and delegates of this Fifty-first Convention of
the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

I salute the movement of the National Association for the Advancement
of Colored People upon its historical achievements for civil rights.

I salute the brilliant, able and dedicated leadership of this great
organization.

Without reservation or equivocation I want to assure the leadership
and membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored
People of the unequivocal, definite and positive support and cooperation of the
Negro American Labor Council.

I hail, with felicitations and congratulations, the long, devoted and
constructive struggle of the leaders of this movement to win for the peoples of
color in this country, full-fledged, first-class citizenship.

Yours has been the role of a quarterback, who is responsible for calling
the strategic and tactical movements, in the struggle for the realization of
the goal of civil rights. The quarterback must have the intellectual competence,
as the result of knowledge and experience, as well as the responsibility and
loyalty to his fellow team workers to be able to make sound and effective
decisions as to whether the great mass forces of Negro America shall hit the
iron line of American racism, or resort to the strategy of a long forward pass
to circumvent the forces of opposition.

Be it said to the credit of the National Association for the Advancement
of Colored People, from its very foundation in 1910, under the able, aggressive
and brilliant leadership of Dr. Dubois, subsequently followed by James Weldon



Johnson and Walter White and, now, Roy Wilkins, that it has successfully executed its major maneuvers in the cause of civil rights.

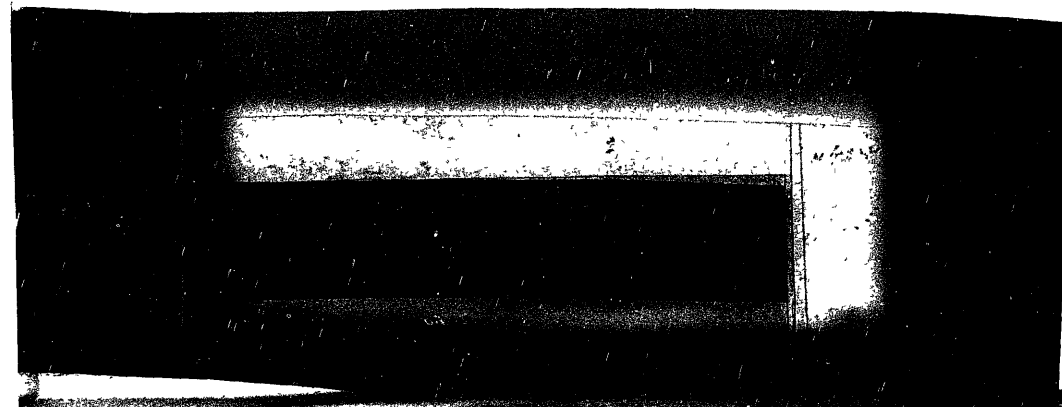
Now, today, because of the forthright position the Association has taken on racial discrimination and segregation in the labor movement, it is under attack.

As a result of misinformation and a lack of information, voices are being raised in various circles of the country that elect to advise the Association about the inadvisability of its policy in directing criticism against trade unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO that practice discrimination. Some of these criticisms come from well-meaning, but misguided, friends of the Negro.

Because of this lack of understanding on the part of some of our labor and liberal friends, as to the basic aims and objectives of the NAACP that are concerned with the elimination of discrimination and segregation wherever they may exist, the gulf of misunderstanding seems to be widening between the Negro community and the labor community.

This is an unfortunate development. It ought not to exist. There is no good reason why it should exist. This problem of apparent conflict between organized labor and the NAACP can be resolved. It ought to be resolved. It will be resolved.

But the misunderstanding will persist until the liberal and labor forces of the nation fully comprehend the fact that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; the Negro American Labor Council; the sit-in demonstrations of Negro students in the South; the boycott against Jim Crow buses in Montgomery, under the leadership of Reverend Martin Luther King; the dramatic battle of the students in Little Rock, under the guidance of the courageous Daisy Bates, are all a part of the flesh and blood, bone and sinew, heart and soul, brain and brawn of a great moral revolution; namely, the Civil Rights Revolution, a revolution for the achievement of human dignity for peoples of color in America.



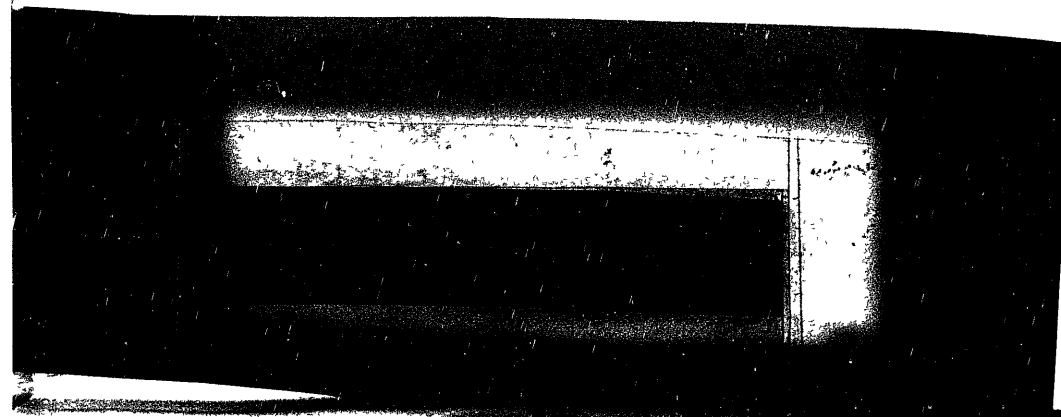
Therefore, in the nature of things, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which has been the sparkplug and voice, historically, as well as the major architect of this civil rights revolution, has no alternative except to give expression to the Olympian wrath burning in the hearts of Negroes against all forms and species of racial inequality. When it ceases to do this, it will no longer serve as the leader of the Civil Rights Revolution.

What is true with respect to the Association is also true with respect to the national Negro American Labor Council. This new voice, which is calling upon Negro trade unionists in particular, and Negro workers in general, to rally their forces under the banner of civil rights, must also remain true, faithful and honest to its sole reason for existence - the complete eradication of the evils of discrimination and segregation in the House of Labor.

Unfortunately, some of our liberal and labor brothers and sisters are under the illusion that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as well as the Negro American Labor Council, are critical of the policies of organized labor because of some disagreement with some incidental and particular instance of racial discrimination by trade unions.

While, naturally, the NAACP and the NALC are concerned that there be no instances of discrimination based upon race against a worker in any trade union, the issues with which the NAACP and the Negro American Labor Council are concerned are bigger and deeper than some anti-Negro action by a union here or there. The chief question with which we are concerned is the achievement of equality of Negro workers in the labor movement and industry.

To be sure, this objective cannot be obtained by any piecemeal settlement of cases of discrimination by trade unions here or there. The realization of this goal will require a major, massive, systematic offensive, on the part of the AFL-CIO Executive Council and leadership, against the whole concept of



discrimination and segregation in the labor movement. It must be understood that the Negro American Labor Council is not interested in pillorying or embarrassing any particular leader of labor concerning racial bias. It does not consider that any individual trade union official, or group of officials, is responsible for the existence of discriminatory practices in the House of Labor.

An analysis of the history of racial barriers in the labor movement will reveal that the entire labor movement bears guilt for the existence of racial disadvantage to workers of color. Thus, no single leader of labor can remedy this problem of racial bias. It is a problem of organized labor as a whole.

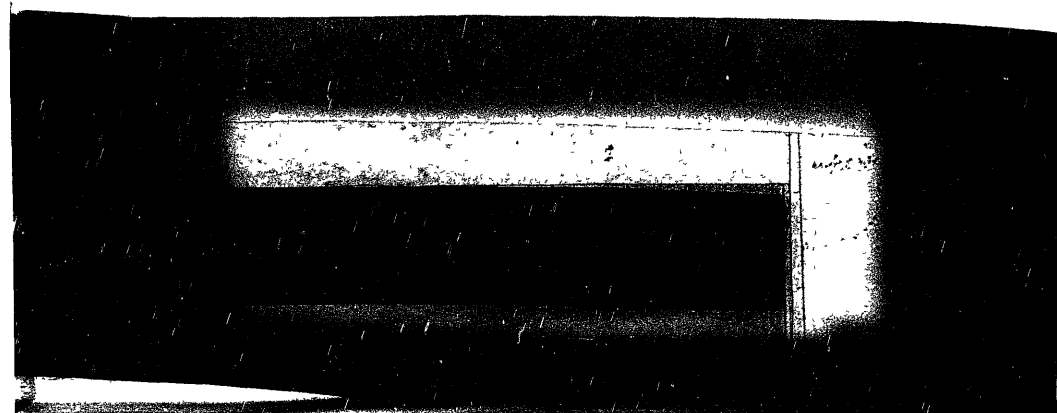
However, a single leader of labor, by example and precept, in the form of taking the initiative in forthrightly meeting the problems of racial discrimination in his own union, can help rally the forces of organized labor against color bias in the unions.

It will naturally be left to the leadership of the organized labor movement to sound the trumpet of opposition to color bias, in order that the massive forces of organized labor may be mobilized against this great economic, social and racial evil.

Our liberal and labor friends must understand that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Negro American Labor Council would not be fulfilling their basic mission if they did not persistently, consistently and vigorously keep this issue of racial discrimination in the House of Labor before the leadership and membership of organized labor, as well as the public.

In very truth, without the question of racial discrimination in trade unions being kept before the leadership and the membership, nothing is likely to be done about it.

It is for this reason that the national Negro American Labor Council was formed.



Even though the large majority of the leaders of the great, powerful labor unions are opposed to discrimination and want to see it abolished, they are not likely themselves voluntarily to move vigorously to achieve this end unless there is some political leverage of pressure brought upon them from time to time.

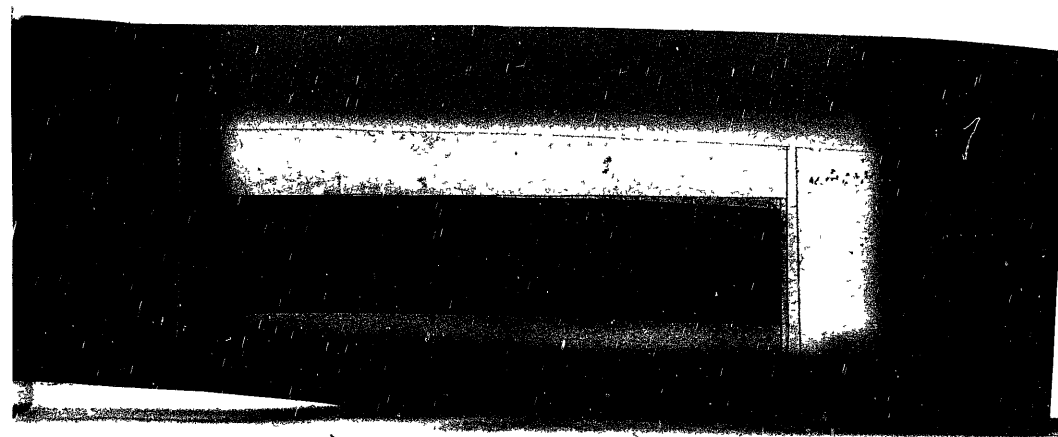
This is not cited in condemnation of labor leaders. It is no reflection upon their commitment to sound trade unionism or their belief in the right of every worker to equal opportunity and benefits in the labor movement. It is the description of the basic law of human behavior: only those groups that are the victims of oppression can be expected and relied upon to move against oppression. Only the workers, the chief victims of economic exploitation by employers, can be depended upon consistently, systematically and aggressively to move to eliminate this exploitation.

It is a matter of common knowledge that throughout the history of the struggles of mankind for liberty there have been those individuals in society who, with great majestic vision and deep spiritual conviction, even at personal sacrifice and danger, have elected to cast their lot on the side of the oppressed. This was the case with most of the Abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Lovejoy, John Brown, and others. These great souls have been the beacon lights of the march of man against man's inhumanity to man.

There are personalities in the labor movement who subscribe to this pattern of dynamic idealism.

Because of considerable criticism of the report by Herbert Hill, labor secretary of the NAACP, on discrimination in the labor unions, it is pertinent to observe that we in the Negro American Labor Council consider the report basically sound, timely, necessary and valuable.

This does not mean that every statement in the report is accurate. The value of a report on a broad social question such as discrimination in the labor movement



cannot be judged in terms of its accuracy with respect to every date involving the beginning of a case on discrimination, every figure concerning numbers of workers involved in a case, or a decimal point concerning the percentage of workers involved in a situation.

No one questions the fact that mistakes may be made, and are usually made, in most reports. But these problems of accuracy in minutiae, with respect to numbers of workers involved in a given situation, or the exact date when a local union eliminated the color bar, have no effect or meaning in relation to the basic thesis that Negro workers are second-class citizens in the labor movement today.

This is the paramount issue before organized labor and Negro workers and the Negro American Labor Council.

It is the position of the Negro American Labor Council that the report in question gives evidence and reenforcement to this fact of second-class citizenship of Negroes in the House of Labor which has always existed. Thus, the fury and fuss against the report and, apparently, against the NAACP are completely without any foundation in reason and logic and reality. The problems concerning discrimination and segregation in the labor movement cannot be resolved in terms of statistical exactitude but only through a broad policy of action against not only isolated trees of racial bias in the forest, but against the forest itself.

This does not mean that the Negro American Labor Council or the NAACP are not to take cognizance of the importance of correct statement of the case concerning discrimination in various trade unions. They do. They have. They will in the future. Moreover, the Negro American Labor Council can, without reservation, state that not only are the basic statements of the report true and sound, but the delegates of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters have presented these facts to convention after convention of the American Federation of Labor for a quarter of a century.



It is unfortunate that some of our liberal friends, along with some of the leaders of labor, even yet do not comprehend the nature, scope, depth and challenge of this civil rights revolution which is surging forward in the House of Labor and all areas of American life. It is destined to shake all of the institutions of our country.

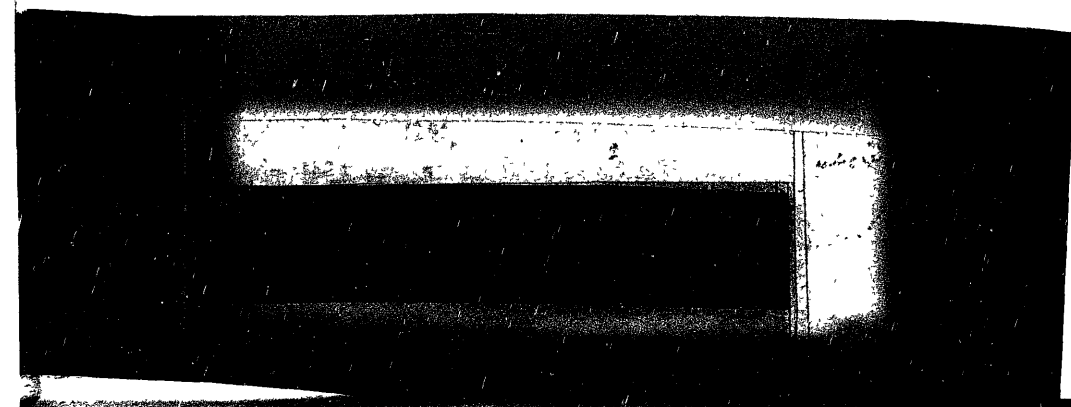
As a result, some of our liberal brothers, in a vain attempt to defend what is alleged to be progress in the struggle against discrimination and segregation in the labor movement, direct criticism and unfounded charges against the NAACP and the Negro American Labor Council.

They elect to view with alarm practically any and all criticisms of the AFL-CIO because of racial discrimination. In this respect they assume to speak for Negro trade unionists and Negro workers. This is easily understandable. The reason for this situation is that, for generations, everybody and anybody who was white has elected to speak for the Negro. Few people take the trouble or the time to attempt to find out whether the Negro wants to, or should, speak for himself. This attitude on the part of some of our liberal and labor friends is an outgrowth of the color caste system of our American culture which has given rise to certain racial habit systems that provide for the white man speaking for the black man.

But this civil rights revolution marks the end of this era of white leadership serving as the spokesman of Negro America.

This does not imply that the struggles of Negroes for human dignity must be viewed as some "sacred cow," immune from criticism. This is certainly not the case. In the struggle of Negroes against color caste they need allies; allies possess the right of criticism. Criticism, instead of being harmful, may be helpful.

Therefore, this vast uprising of Negroes against the old order of white supremacy in America must and will be subjected to the fires of hostile comment.



Every great and new revolution for the redirection of social forces into new paths of creativity of promise and hope must pass through a crucible of trial.

Because of the profound soul-searching that began with the advent of Negro trade unionists upon the stage of history as a new force in organized labor, leaders of labor and leaders in other areas of American life have set about determining upon the course of its orientation.

Hence, let us briefly say a word about the Negro American Labor Council.

What can the Negro American Labor Council achieve?

It can give Negro trade unionists a sense of unity, both among themselves and with their white brothers. It can also provide them with a sense of purpose, direction and mission and dedication to the philosophy of trade unionism and the program for equality of Negro trade unionists in the labor movement.

It can promulgate its philosophy, to the effect that racially segregated, or Jim Crow, unions do not have the right to exist within the framework of a free trade union movement but since they do exist they do not have the right of final decision as to whether or when they shall cease to exist and conform with the national policy on discrimination and segregation as set forth in the constitution.

The Negro American Labor Council can help the AFL-CIO to cleanse the House of Labor of color caste discrimination and segregation, which will help it win the confidence and faith in its declarations of democracy and freedom among the laboring masses of Africa and Asia.

In order that there may be no misgivings and misapprehensions about the policy of the Negro American Labor Council on certain basic questions, it is pertinent to indicate:

It is not a labor union and will not seek to become the collective bargaining agent of any group of workers to negotiate agreements concerning rates of pay, hours of work, or rules governing working conditions. It has no visions



of becoming a black Federation of Labor. It is not anti, but pro-AFL-CIO. It is pro-AFL-CIO leadership.

It is non-partisan, but not non-political. It is pro-Republicans who are pro-civil rights and pro-labor. It is pro-Democrats who are pro-civil rights and pro-labor. It is anti-Communist and anti-Fascist.

The Negro American Labor Council is necessary to achieve greater contact and communication among Negro trade unionists for the achievement of their common goals that involve their fight for equality.

It is necessary because the AFL-CIO, though committed to a national policy against discrimination and segregation, will not voluntarily move toward the implementation of this policy unless it is caused to move, and it cannot be caused to move except through an organization which is committed to the elimination of discrimination and segregation.

The fact is, the practice of racial discrimination and segregation has reached the stage of institutionalization in the labor movement. It is taken for granted. It is viewed with utter complacency, apathy, unconcern, if not indifference. This has been true from the very foundation of the labor movement in the United States up to the present time. There are historical, socio-economic, political and ethnic reasons for this attitude, but it is important to point out that this is not peculiar to the labor movement.

Racial discrimination has reached the stage of institutionalization in Government, in the Church, in business and industry, in the schools, colleges and universities, in sports and entertainment. The segregation system of various institutions of the country is given rigidity and resistance because it is encrusted with the dogma of white supremacy. The labor movement, being an integral factor of the American community, naturally reflects the mores and attitudes that prevail in the community.



It may not be amiss to observe that the Negro American Labor Council is not a new phenomenon in the labor movement.

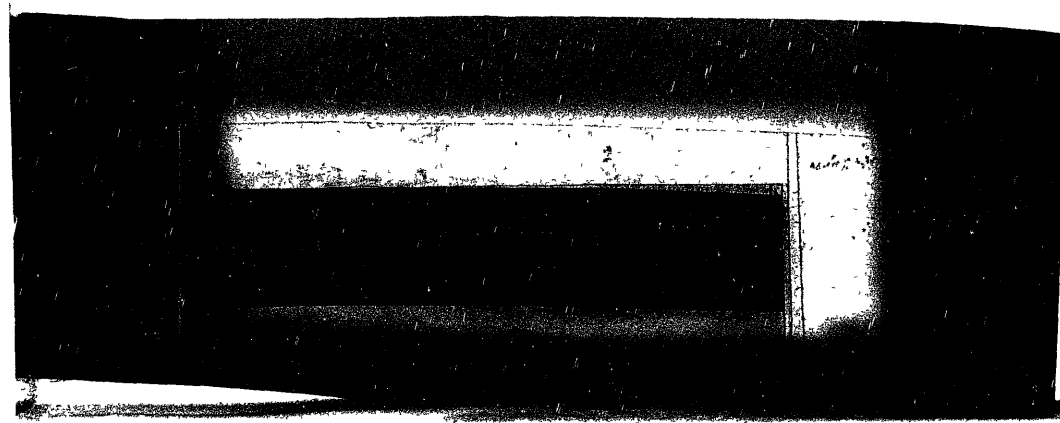
The early Jewish immigrants to this country set up the United Hebrew Trades, the purpose of which was to advance the cause of Jewish workers. Today, the Jewish workers have developed the Jewish Labor Committee, a movement of considerable proportions which has worked effectively in the civil rights field, not only for Jews, but other minorities. It is recognized and accepted as a legitimate phase of the American labor movement by the AFL-CIO. Jewish workers also receive moral and public relations support from the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith.

On account of the fact that the early Irish immigrants were the victims of religious persecution, they found it necessary to establish Catholic trade unions. In addition to Catholic trade unions, the Hibernians, the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name Society, and other Catholic organizations work with vigor and determination to eliminate discrimination against Irish Catholics in this country.

Realizing the futility of depending upon outside forces to advocate their cause against the evil practices of discrimination and segregation, Puerto Rican workers are now in the process of establishing a Puerto Rican Labor Committee.

The Negro American Labor Council can play an effective and progressive role in opposing anti-labor legislation such as the "right-to-work" laws. Although "right-to-work" laws were defeated in California and Ohio in 1959, the movement for the extension of these laws in various states and, finally, the enactment of a federal "right-to-work" law still has vitality.

Be it said to the credit of the NAACP, in cooperation with the Committee on Political Education of the AFL-CIO, it waged a vigorous and effective campaign against "right-to-work" laws in the aforementioned states. It is an understatement to add that were it not for the relentless educational campaign of the NAACP against the "right-to-work" laws, they might not have been defeated.



The Negro American Labor Council can be effective in joining hands with trade unions in opposing anti-labor politicians and supporting pro-labor political leaders in government and out of government.

We have been asked, "Will the Negro American Labor Council promote black nationalism?"

While the Council does not accept black nationalism, it recognizes its virtues as well as its vices.

What is black nationalism?

It is, basically, the Negro's reaction-behavior pattern to white nationalism. White nationalism is the cause - black nationalism is the effect.

Black nationalism is a ghetto people's defense and offense mechanism against persecution, insult, oppression and poverty. In this respect it is comparable to Zionism.

Black nationalism is psychological compensation for social, economic and political rejection by the dominant racial power system. It is a manifestation of disillusionment with the concepts, professions and practices of Christianity and democracy.

It is an expression of fear and frustration, despair and desperation on the part of the Negro, with the violence of race hate. It is a bitter outcry against the empty and mocking, conservative, liberal, religious and labor, white paternalism. It's a direct, if awkward, expression of belief in the simple fact that the salvation of a people must come from within - that our friends may help us, but they cannot save us.

One of the dangers of black nationalism is that it tends to breed hatred against white people merely because they are white, not because they have committed some wrong against Negroes. This is the behavior pattern of white nationalists.

Black nationalism tends to direct its venomous attacks upon white people,



instead of discriminatory practices of some white people.

Black nationalism tends to develop into a conspiracy against Negroes themselves, by opposing the Negroes' fight for freedom on the grounds that freedom from discrimination and segregation will lead to racial mixing and the loss of proper devotion to the black man's African heritage - which is both folly and a fallacy.

It is based upon the false assumption of the capacity of Negroes for self-sufficiency in this age of science, industrialism and technology.

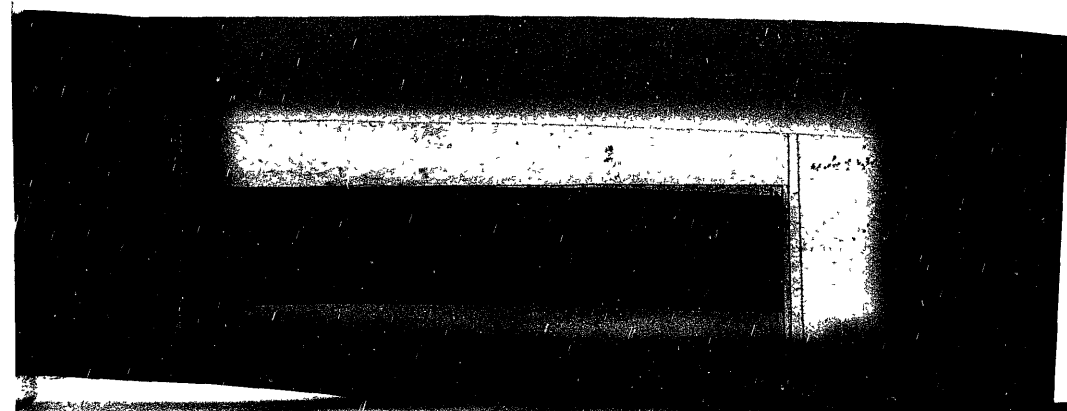
The basic remedy for black nationalism - which can become a danger to social peace, as white nationalism is a danger to social peace - is the abolition of white nationalism, which expresses itself in lynchings, mob law, disenfranchisement, segregation and discrimination.

While black nationalism, like white nationalism, is unsound and leads to violent forms of extremism, it is not to be equated with rational racial unity which may be constructive, creative and healthy for self-defense and various forms of cultural, political, economic and social achievement.

Black nationalism is unsound because it disallows contact between the races. Without contact there cannot be communication, and without communication there breeds suspicions, doubts, fears and frustrations that prevent understanding, confidence and cooperation between Negro and white workers.

Thus, to the question, "will the Negro American Labor Council promote black nationalism," the answer is no. Instead of promoting black nationalism, the Council will serve to remove the basis of black nationalism by working to eliminate discrimination and segregation in the labor movement and the government, or white nationalism.

It is said in Holy Writ: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?"



While the Negro American Labor Council rejects black nationalism as a doctrine and practice of racial separatism, it recognizes the fact that history has placed upon the Negro, and the Negro alone, the basic responsibility to complete the incompleting Civil War Revolution through keeping the fires of freedom burning in the Civil Rights Revolution. It is well-nigh axiomatic that only he who wears the shoe can feel the pinch,

Only the Negro, who feels the sting and humiliation of racial discrimination and segregation, can be depended upon uncompromisingly to fight in labor unions, government, industry, the Church, and schools.

Only Negro students will march in the South and face police brutality and prisons for civil rights. Only Negro students would bear insult and abuse to enter Central High School in Little Rock.

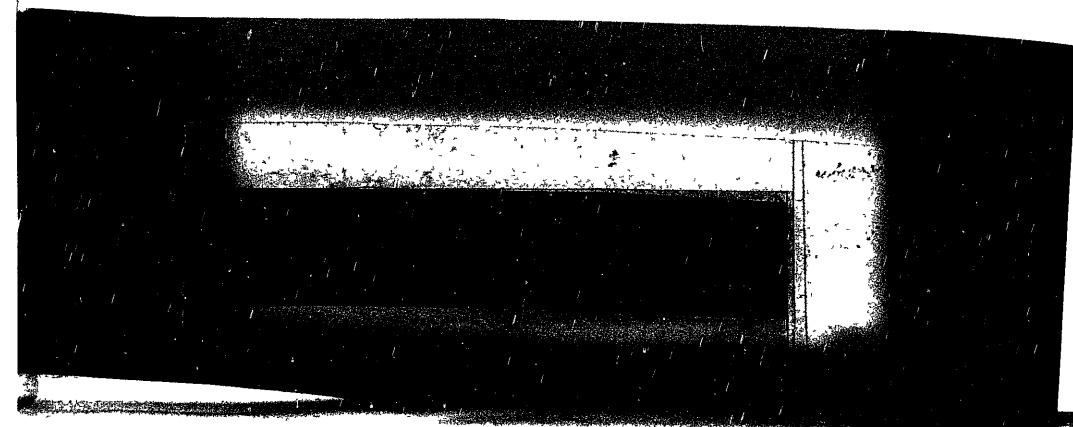
Only Negroes would walk for a whole year to boycott Jim Crow buses in Montgomery.

Only Negro trade unionists would introduce resolutions in the AFL-CIO San Francisco Convention for the expulsion of two powerful railroad unions because of the color bar.

Only Negro trade unionists can be depended upon to build the Negro American Labor Council to fight to cleanse the House of Labor of the evil of racial bias.

And while the Negro American Labor Council has not, and will not, have a color bar, we do not apologize for pointing out that the primary and sole purpose of this movement is to organize Negro trade unionists to eradicate the evil of racial discrimination from which they, alone, suffer.

The question which the Council seeks to answer is not whether success was achieved in getting a Negro carpenter on this or that building construction job, or whether a Negro trade unionist sits on this or that executive board, or is on this or that staff. While these developments may have statistical significance, the problem is bigger than that.



Our goals are not just so-called success in isolated instances but basic accomplishment, in the sense of bringing new values into the life of the Negro, such as acceptance into the mainstream of American life - social, economic, political, upon a basis of worth, talent, ability, character; recognition as a first-class citizen, and member of the trade union movement; elimination of the conditions that render these isolated cases of so-called progress necessary.

This movement is the creative and social agent of a great, authentic, and majestic revolution - a moral revolution, a civil rights revolution, which is engrossed in and affected by the broad and vast flow of human events, and the direction of the course of history in the labor movement in particular, and our country and the world in general. Its major historical mission is to help complete an incompleting social and moral revolution.

The growth, health, moral and spiritual strength of our country stem from, and are rooted in, the completion of this incompleting moral revolution of civil rights. Let me add that history has placed the basic responsibility for the achievement of this monumental task of completing this incompleting civil rights revolution upon the shoulders of the Negro.

In the nature of things, no other social force in American life has the spiritual preparation to lead the forces of the Civil Rights Revolution which is only born in social suffering, sacrifice and struggle, economic oppression and political persecution, except the Negro, the chief victim of this adversity.

Thus, Negro trade unionists and workers must bear their own cross for their own liberation. They must make their own crisis decisions bearing upon their life, labor and liberty. Nobody else can, will, or should do this for them.

