

THE NEGRO COMMUNITY AND THE UNION MOVEMENT

IN PREVIOUS SECTIONS of this study the problem of the organization of Negroes into unions has been discussed from the point of view of the problems connected with their relationship to the management and the attitude of white workers. In the present section the difficulties of union organization which arise within the Negro community itself are treated. Even though Negroes might be admitted freely into all union organizations the past prejudice which has been shown them has developed in the community a feeling which would inhibit many from joining unless it is combated. Likewise the mechanisms which companies use for the domination of colored workers have invaded many community organizations. Only when the union ideology becomes widespread and accepted in the community will there be possible a union movement.

Chapter XIX discusses the problem of the union movement and the social organization of the Negro community. First, the broad outlines of the class structure of the Negro community and its relationship to the class structure of the total community are described. Certain institutions such as the "company" financed social clubs which have been organized in the community are discussed. Following this is a treatment of such organizations and institutions as the church, the press, and three national Negro organizations: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and the National Negro Congress. The conclusion of the chapter is that at present there is no organization among Negroes which is devoted to the single task of integrating colored workers into the general labor movement.

It was a task of the research to point out a method of more fully integrating Negroes into the trade union movement. Chapter XX outlines what the writers feel is a possible program. This policy has been followed by other minority groups and could be profitably used by Negroes to accomplish this end.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE NEGRO COMMUNITY AND ITS RELATION TO THE UNION MOVEMENT

MOST discussions of the question of Negroes in the labor movement have centered around the issue of racial discrimination. While discrimination undoubtedly has been a powerful factor in restraining Negroes from joining trade unions, the fact should not be overlooked that the defensive reaction of the community against such prejudice has been to confirm the point of view of those who are suspicious of or even fear white workers. This has led to the development of a strong sentiment among Negroes (both workers and others) against union organizations. This sentiment, unless combated, will act as a significant barrier in keeping Negroes out of trade unions even after union doors have been completely opened to them. It is important, therefore, to examine the social structure of the Negro community to see who its leaders are, what class divisions exist within the community and what organizations encourage attitudes either favorable or unfavorable toward union organization.

THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE NEGRO COMMUNITY

Negroes in America are by no means a homogeneous group. Although they were introduced into this country as slaves and for a short time were an undifferentiated mass of laborers, it was not long before differences in occupation, training, and education began to appear. Perhaps the first differentiation to arise was that between the field hands and the house servants during the slavery period. Later, numbers of slaves were taught mechanical and skilled trades and became far superior in many ways to the rest of the slave population. With emancipation, differences in education, training, and occupation permitted the development of well defined social strata within

the group. The migration to cities, which has been a continuous process since the Civil War, gave the more educated and trained upper strata (largely mulatto), with their superior education and cultural advantages and their greater familiarity with the city life, an opportunity hitherto denied to exploit this education and training. They furnished the professional and business services which the black migrants to the city needed. Reuter says:

. . . there was a need for teachers and preachers, for physicians and lawyers, for business men and entertainers, and for all the host of other parasitic and semi-parasitic classes that go to make up a modern community. With the rise of a middle-class, the race was able to support a professional and leisure class; previously the educated Negro was an idler and a parasite. The isolation of the race forced Negroes to depend upon their own educated men and so made a place for such men.¹

In Chicago, for example, there had always been a few Negro professional and business men. But in the words of one doctor the migration "helped colored lawyers, doctors, and every colored person in Chicago." He continued:

They have been our best patrons. . . . I do not believe that this office building would have been here today if it had not been for those Negroes who came from the South. In less than thirty-eight years we have increased from five to two hundred and fifty doctors. We are living in better homes, and have more teachers in the schools; and nearly every colored church has benefited.²

Thus the wave of plantation Negro migrants to the cities definitely established a small elite at the top of the Negro social group.

The development of this Negro upper class is reflected in the census returns for the decades since 1890. Listed in the professional service group for 1890 were to be found 33,994 Negroes. This number increased to 47,219 in 1900; 68,350 in 1910; 81,771 in 1920; and 135,926 in 1930. This last figure

¹ Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States*, p. 359.

² E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, pp. 108-9.

shows an increase of nearly 50 per cent for that census period alone. In the thirty years from 1900 to 1930 the number of physicians increased from 1,734 to 3,805, the number of dentists from 212 to 1,773, lawyers from 728 to 1,175, teachers from 21,267 to 54,439, and clergymen from 15,528 to 25,034.

Although the number of professionals has increased tremendously within the last forty years this group still represents a small per cent of the total Negro population. The professional service group (eliminating for the moment the middle class business men) increased from 1 per cent of the total Negro population in 1890 to 2.5 per cent in 1930. At this latter date there was one clergyman for every 475 Negro inhabitants, one dentist for every 6,707 inhabitants, one lawyer or judge for every 9,536 inhabitants, one physician or surgeon for every 3,125 inhabitants and one school teacher for every 218 inhabitants. There were also some business men who belonged to this class. In addition to those members of the upper class who were professionals and business men, administering to the needs of the Negro community, the Negro upper class also included a large number of persons who in one way or another were dependent upon white persons and (more or less directly) upon upper class white persons for their status. This group included administrators and other employees of certain social and philanthropic agencies, professionals employed by businesses and industries owned by whites, politicians (who were a part of the city or local political machine), and some social workers.⁸

There also has appeared within the pyramid of Negro society a middle class composed of small shop keepers, independent farmers, skilled and semi-skilled artisans, and civil service employees. This group has begun to fill the distance which existed between the masses of the race at the bottom and the small class of educated Negroes at the apex of the pyramid. The professionals and the highly successful business group are, of course,

⁸ It should be emphasized that the term "upper class," when applied to Negroes, refers to the position of certain Negroes *within* the Negro community. The income, standard of living, cultural attributes, etc., of the Negro upper class is comparable probably to the "middle" section of the white middle class, rather than to the white upper class.

at the top of the pyramid and constitute the upper class within "this world within a world."

This numerically small group of upper class Negroes have created for themselves a social world which is, in a sense, apart from both Negro and white groups. Although they consider themselves culturally, educationally, and economically superior to the great mass of Negroes, as indeed they are, they have overcome their aversion to the lowly black, lower class Negro and have assumed a position of leadership within the group.

They are the men who teach the black man [lower class Negroes] in the schools and in the Negro colleges, who preach to him from the pulpits, who manage his books and business enterprises, who rise to prominence in all the social, political, and economic affairs of the race. They, too, are the men who rob and defraud him in the lodges, who grow wealthy, through appealing to the Negro's desire to be like the white man, with nostrums to blanch the skin and straighten the hair, who gain wealth and distinction among the race by fostering, and catering to, the Negro's morbid interest in and superstitious fear of death and love of vulgar funeral display. But whether they guide and help the black man or fatten on his gullibility, they are in every respect the prominent men of the race and the leaders in the race's social affairs.⁴

These persons, who, before they were able to occupy this position "on top of the Negro community," were restless and arrogantly resentful toward the social organization which did not seem to offer a place for them, now have become respectable, comfortable, and have in fact "settled down." There is, of course, some agitation for extended civil rights but these protests are seldom carried to the point where the fight would endanger the comforts of their position or cast reflection on their respectability.

The philosophy of the upper class Negro as expressed by one of its most able exponents, Dr. DuBois, encourages the development of the able educated class as a means of salvation for the masses of the Negroes. Thus DuBois' plea for the "Talented Tenth" was made on the basis of racial advancement.

⁴ Reuter, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

"The Negro race," he said, "like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the 'Talented Tenth'; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. Can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character?"²⁶ Whether this argument be true or false, it has been used as a rationalization for the development of the talented upper class rather than, and often to the detriment of, the black masses. But the fact is that the elite in the Negro world has no more love for its masses than the white elite has for its masses. The distance is about as great in the former case as in the latter. However, the color line which divides all Negroes from all whites has led to expressions by upper class Negroes of sympathy and pathos for the lower class which, on a verbal level, exceeds that of the whites. The educated upper class Negro does not, now that he has found a comfortable place, care to champion doctrines which purport to help the black worker by changing the social system, for he recognizes that it is this social system that has given him a position of advantage within his group. In addition to the fact that he is complacent and respectable, or perhaps because he is complacent and respectable, the upper class Negro is economically conservative. His primary interest tends to be in that which protects the differential between himself and the Negro masses, rather than in an effort to improve the conditions of the majority of his group in a manner which almost necessarily endangers his own position.

The Negro masses have accepted the leadership of this handful of upper class persons. Since black workers have been isolated from the influence of the white working class, the talented, educated members of their group appeared as their natural leaders. Race consciousness has built up a semblance of solidarity between the classes which has benefited the Negro

²⁶ *The Negro Problem*, a series of articles by representative American Negroes of today.

elite by providing its members with a tenable social position and has benefited the blacks by giving them leaders who have symbolized to them their possibilities as persons if conditions but allowed.

The Negro upper class depends on this racial solidarity to maintain and enable it to exploit the market for professional and business services which racial prejudice has tended to create. This situation has been referred to as "the advantage of the disadvantaged." As early as 1850 the idea of developing an economic structure within the Negro group paralleling that of the white community was championed and has continued to the present. The appeal has been made for the development of a "black economy" which would furnish work for young Negroes and advance the race generally. No Negro employer was ever engaged in business for the sordid purpose of making money. On the contrary all were motivated solely by the desire to build race institutions and to create opportunities for youths. Toward this end Negro consumers were supposed to patronize Negro business and professional men even though the goods and services might be inferior to those of their white competitors and more expensive as well. On the other hand, Negro employees of colored business men, in the name of race loyalty, were supposed to be willing to make sacrifices in the form of low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions. Recently, when employees of the *Amsterdam News* (a Negro newspaper) began to form a labor union, William Pickens, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, stated that colored workers should not join labor unions if they are employed in Negro business enterprises, since their employers are struggling to build up race business. This argument is curiously similar to the infant industry argument for protective tariffs.

In their relationship with upper class whites the Negro elite have been tractable and, as leaders of their race, have proved valuable to the white elite in controlling the mass of Negroes. Thinking and feeling toward the lower class Negroes in much the same way as does the upper class white man (because they are in the same sort of relation to these Negroes as are the

whites), the "good" colored people and the "good" white people have seldom failed to get together upon questions of policy. This does not mean that the Negro upper class has never fought for the rights of the Negro masses but rather they have tended to fight their own battles in the name of the masses and have continually compromised on issues which, if actually resolved, might endanger their class position. The Negro upper class has always occupied a paradoxical position in that the very roots of its existence are a ghetto system and at the same time it is ideologically committed to agitation for civil rights and the abolition of all forms of segregation and prejudice. Its hope for expansion, and in fact its very existence, is dependent upon a continuation and strengthening of racial solidarity. Abstract principles of equality which were important in gaining and holding the leadership of the race have tended to become less attractive to this class. The espousal of such ideals, now that the depression has weakened their position, constitutes an additional threat to their already precarious existence.

Toward the labor movement the Negro upper class has been generally antagonistic. This antagonism, in some measure, may be traced historically to the economic rivalry which existed between the slaves and the poor whites of the South in pre-Civil War times. The treatment of Negroes by the white working class and by union organizations since emancipation has tended to aggravate this antagonism. Negro leaders saw that unions attempted to keep Negro workers out of industry and that employers often opened industrial opportunities to them. Since Negro leaders tended to think in terms of their own class position their reasoning seems to have been that, if the Negro is to be exploited, it is better that he be exploited by the white employer who offers some rewards in the form of more employment and promotions than by white workers. Many members of this class have maintained their positions by the tolerance of the white employing group and have inevitably been influenced to some extent (consciously or unconsciously) by their financial dependence on well-to-do white persons. Negro politicians and political appointees who constituted an important section of the

elite were for the most part dominated by the city political machine, which in turn was always subject to considerable control by business and industrial interests. In many industrial centers, Negro doctors and lawyers, to say nothing of the clergy, often had profitable connections with the large industrial concerns.

But perhaps the most important factor in the antagonism of the Negro elite toward labor unions has been their "rise by individual merit" philosophy. Believing that education and training would break down race barriers on the one hand, and (paradoxically enough) make possible a Negro economic structure on the other, they have constantly refused to think in terms of labor or labor organizations. From this group have arisen a number of schools of thought; the common characteristic of all of these philosophies is an intense consciousness of race. Carried to their logical conclusion these programs would develop a black economy within the white economy of this country and would encourage the creation of a large Negro upper class. Since it is necessarily based on race solidarity, such a program is directly opposed to any which has as its objective the development of co-operation between black and white workers. These social programs held little for the black worker except the substitution of Negro employers for white employers, but many Negro workers have been influenced by their philosophy and are not aware of the social role of class differences within their group. They have allowed a handful of highly romantic, race-conscious, upper class Negroes to lead them into accepting the myth of a "black economy." These workers have been encouraged to turn their backs on the white laboring man and his unions.

It is extremely improbable, with a very few exceptions, that the present Negro leadership will encourage the Negro worker to line up in a fight against the capitalistic interests of the country. Negro leaders as a class will probably have little sympathy with any organization which might engage in long, bitter, and bloody economic warfare. They will hardly undergo the disadvantages of loss of prestige and the curtailment of income necessarily involved in such a struggle. With the ever-present

opportunity to earn large sums by strike-breaking, these upper class, capitalistically indoctrinated Negroes will prefer the opportunistic procedure of compromise and its immediate monetary compensation. They may play the same role, since they occupy the same position as the white professional men, the business interests and the small shopkeepers of industrial centers from whose numbers have arisen the bloody vigilante committees and the "back to work" movements.

Schuyler recently commented as follows concerning the attitude of the Negro upper class toward union organization:

Their desertion of the struggling Negro workers in this crisis constitutes one of the most shameful chapters in our recent history. The new position Negro labor has won in the past year has been gained in spite of the old leadership. It has been won with new leadership; militant young men and women from the ranks of labor and grizzled black veterans of the pick and shovel and the blast furnace.*

He concludes:

Nowhere was the bulk of Negro leaders actively aiding the Negro workers upon whom they depended for a livelihood. Nowhere were the "educated" classes co-operating with the unions to aid the work of organization, save in a few notable instances, and there by only one or two individuals. Nowhere were Negro preachers opening their churches for labor meetings although they were glad to give any itinerant bush priest a "break." Here and there a preacher, lawyer, a politician or social worker was found whose aid to the workers cannot be too highly commended. But a great many more denounced the new unions as "radical," were belligerent in siding with the employers and in some instances openly recruited strike-breakers to take the jobs of the black unionists. The sentiments they expressed were invariably a rehash of the editorials in the local kept press.

But the most disheartening observation in connection with this labor revolution was the indifference, hostility and open opposition of so many "educated" Negroes holding positions of trust and leadership in their respective communities. Their reactions to the labor drive

*George S. Schuyler, "Reflections on Negro Leadership," *Crisis*, LXIV (November, 1937), 328.

seemed to range from sheer ignorance of the issues involved to active co-operation with the efforts of employers to halt the workers' bid for power and protection.⁷

In the recent organizational drive of the C.I.O., it was found that in almost every locality the Negro professional and business groups opposed the participation of Negro workers. The *Pittsburgh Courier* said:

Black Detroit is in uproar and confusion as the zero hour looms for the showdown fight between Ford Motor Company and the United Automobile Workers of America. Sides are being taken violently. Most of the preachers and professional men are against the U.A.W. and openly in favor of the Ford Motor Company. Dependent upon the masses for their livelihood, they fear that if the Ford Negroes espouse the union cause they will ultimately lose their jobs which would be a major disaster for Detroit.⁸

In St. Louis it was reported that only two preachers out of hundreds had taken any favorable interest in the unions. "... one reason advanced for the indifference or hostility of most of the Negro preachers to organized labor is that they are constantly begging small sums from various business concerns, and so feel indebted to them."⁹ In Chester, Pennsylvania, "Rev. Barbour severely scored the 'better' Negroes for their reactionism and slave psychology. 'They do not lift a finger,' he said, 'to protect the masses of their people. They have the utmost contempt for the masses.'¹⁰ The situation was no different in Indianapolis, Indiana, "The attitude of the rest of the leading Negroes allegedly runs from indifference to hostility."

There have been, however, some few individuals and organizations that have given encouragement to labor. A handful of prominent individuals such as Robert Vann of Pittsburgh, Earl Dickerson of Chicago, J. F. Marney of Cleveland, Harry Pace of Chicago, and State Representative Marshall Shepard of Philadelphia have supported the organization of Negro workers verbally. The National Medical Association is reported to have

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, September 9, 1937.

⁹ September 2, 1937.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, August 12, 1937.

endorsed the C.I.O. as tending to raise the standard and position of Negro labor.

None of the old conservative leaders in the Negro community, verbal assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, possess the capability or the willingness to consummate an effective program for organizing Negro labor. The prejudice toward Negroes demonstrated by the American Federation of Labor has enabled many persons presumably interested in Negro unionism to express their supposed sympathy for labor by attacking the American Federation of Labor and at the same time to do nothing themselves which would actually further the organization of Negro workers. While it has not been possible to extend the charge of racial prejudice against the Committee for Industrial Organization, Negro leadership has discredited the movement by characterizing it as "radical" and "communistic."

With this summary description of the broad outline of class differences within the community, it will now be possible to discuss the use of community leaders and institutions by the industrial interests to discourage Negro membership in unions.

In recent years, Negroes have for the most part entered the large "trustified" and non-union industries. Often they have been hired for the purpose of weakening unions already formed or unions in the process of being formed by white workers. Many of the large companies which began to employ Negroes at this time previously had had difficulties with foreign-born white workers. It was important for them to keep Negroes from joining unions, both because they were becoming numerically important in some of the industries and because they were considered the force which was to split labor into uncooperating racial groups. With this objective in mind, these companies have developed organizations, as well as utilized existing organizations within the Negro community, to control the lives of their Negro workers and to mold public opinion in the Negro community against unionism. This was not such a difficult task in most cases, for, as we have seen, the leadership in the Negro community is for the most part in the hands of a conservative,

capitalistically-minded educated class, anxious to coöperate with the white upper class; that the predominant myth in the community is one of the "black economy"; and that the historic competition between the white and Negro working class has created intense chauvinism among white workers and race consciousness among Negroes which has usually made coöperation between the two groups impossible.

NEGRO WELFARE WORKERS AND SOCIAL CLUBS FOSTERED BY PRIVATE INDUSTRY

One of the most important techniques employed by steel companies has been that of maintaining Negro welfare and social workers to control opinion in the community and report the outside activities of the black workers.¹¹ Such people usually have been chosen because of their influence and importance in the colored community.

Negro social workers were first introduced into the steel industry in 1918 at the insistence of the Pittsburgh Urban League. At that time, eighteen Negro welfare workers were placed in the eleven plants which hired the majority of the Negro laborers in the industry.¹² The appointment of a Negro to such a position gave him an estimable status in his community. The fact that he was received in the front office, had a desk in the employment superintendent's department, and talked familiarly with the bosses engendered among Negroes the idea of a democratic spirit on the part of the management. To add substance to the illusion, managers occasionally gave Negroes other white-collar jobs.¹³

¹¹ The present discussion relates particularly to the concentration of these practices among Negro workers. In the steel industry as a whole, in 1930, Negroes constituted 8.5 per cent of the total employees, .1 per cent of the professional, technical and highly skilled group, and 18.5 per cent of the social workers. This discussion does not concern professional social workers in bona fide private or public social agencies.

¹² Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 258.

¹³ A. Philip Randolph, in writing about the advanced positions of some Negroes in the Pullman Company, asserted: "Anything which does not benefit the rank and file of porters is no benefit at all. Such is the case with the porters who have been given big jobs in the Pullman offices at big salaries."

The purpose of the Negro social worker was explained by one of the personnel directors of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation as follows:

The welfare worker has given us insight into what we term the peculiarities of their race, that perhaps otherwise could never have been understood. We seek information regarding employees that will be to their benefit both on and off the job. We, therefore, want the worker to feel free to come to us whenever he so desires.¹⁴

Knapp pointed out further that one of the duties of the welfare worker was to keep the company informed of the behavior of its employees while they are off duty.

One of the many successful efforts has been the investigating of our men off duty, through the welfare worker. By this means we are able to catch up the loafer, thus ridding the community of undesirables. . . . Through our welfare worker, we were able to trace out disorderly houses and close them up promptly.¹⁵

Such pronouncements indicate the extent to which the Negro community is under the control and constant surveillance of the steel companies. Concerning the practices of one social worker, a Negro steel worker in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, remarked:

B—— is supposed to be the Negro welfare director, but he goes around the colored and reports to the company whether the men are for the company, how they live and everything else. He is no good and anybody will tell you that. He is the company's "stool pigeon." No one respects him no more than they do the other "stool pigeons."
[Interview (Duquesne, Pa.) July 17, 1934.]

Those jobs only benefit the job holders and the company, not the Pullman porters. The jobs are only given to impress the porters with the idea that the company is doing something for them; that it has an interest in them. *They are jokers.* For they only help to chloroform the porters and keep them from organizing. Don't look to the Negroes holding jobs in the company for a remedy. They cannot speak out. They dare not speak out. If they do they will lose their jobs." [*"The Case of the Pullman Porter," The Messenger*, VII, (July, 1925), 255.]

¹⁴W. J. Knapp, "An Experiment with Negro Labor," *Opportunity*, I (February, 1923), 19.

¹⁵Ibid.

If we had a better colored welfare man for the company who would not be a "stool pigeon" and a messenger for the company.... But the Negro welfare worker has his own class who associates together and works against the working colored man. He is making it bad for himself and his race. He snoops around and goes into the homes and looks into the morals and tries to keep the colored down, cut their relief and everything. We can't get nowhere because of that. [Interview (Duquesne, Pa.) July 18, 1934.]

Negro social workers have other special assignments besides that of espionage. They are sent out as election workers when their companies are interested in a political campaign or issue. An instance of such activity is reported by a Negro steel worker.

The Negro welfare worker goes through the city and tells Negroes to vote on this or that man with specimen ballots showing that the Republican or Democratic Party backed this man and that the company is one hundred per cent for him. They tell you to vote this way or lose your job. Plenty of colored are afraid to come out to register and vote like they want to. [Interview (Duquesne, Pa.) July 17, 1934.]

In the recent drive to institute company unions, Negro social workers were sometimes instructed to regiment the unemployed workers to vote for the plan.

In June, 1933, B——, the Negro welfare man, told me to go into the mill, that they had an open gate on that date, and vote for a representative. That was for the nomination, and the following Friday we went back for election. That was the last date I was inside the mill gate. If I had it to do over I would not vote again. [Interview (Duquesne, Pa.) July 17, 1934.]

An important function of some Negro welfare workers at the present time is to indoctrinate Negroes against unionism. One of the welfare workers described how this was done.

We had no open campaign against Negroes joining the union, but we did good work informally. Take the men who have been working for the company for the past thirty years, both those who are on pension or who are working for pensions. We got them to talk around with the other workers. Perhaps the best argument is when

these old workers tell about the strike of 1892 when the union was first broken up and Negroes were allowed in the industry for the first time. [Interview (Homestead, Pa.) July 6, 1934.]

This welfare worker was a preacher in a small church and hence was able to reach directly a number of workers.

I am a preacher too and I have a church of about five hundred members in Rankin. I did not speak out for a long time. Then finally I did talk. I told them that the company respected the freedom of the pulpit and that no one had asked me to speak. Then I talked against an outside union and told them what my attitude was. After that only one man of my congregation joined the outside union and he was one of those fellows whom you can't tell anything to. [Interview (Homestead, Pa.) July 6, 1934.]

He also tried to win the support of other ministers.

The Negro preachers have not done as much as they could in the situation. You know some people would be willing to sell the "cloth." Some of these preachers have been very lax and would sell their race for a mess of pottage. There was one Negro preacher out in Braddock. One of the officials asked me to talk to him and said, "I've talked to him but he will not listen." I went to this preacher and explained to him what he was doing. He said, "They [the union] promised to make me a donation." I asked him if he would sell out his race for a donation. There was a meeting scheduled, but after I had talked to him he gave up the idea and cancelled the meeting. Other preachers in Clairton are all right. They think clearly on this matter and advise their people along right lines. [Interview (Homestead, Pa.) July 6, 1934.]

When asked what technique he considered most effective in fighting unionism, he answered:

I think that the best method of reaching Negroes is through personal interviews. Just to mix with and talk to the men in small groups or individually. In such small groups as Bible classes lots of effective work can be done. Women are also very effective. You can reach these women through women's clubs and churches. They will influence the men. Lots of good work has been done over back fences. [Interview (Homestead, Pa.) July 6, 1934.]

Closely related to the activities of the welfare workers are those of social clubs which exist in most important steel plants and often are organized by social workers.

In addition to the shop representative plan we have a group of old employees who have formed a social club. They call it the Diamond C Club because that is our trademark. It is STRICTLY a social affair. Recently they had a picnic and I went there myself and played ball. There are only about 150 members because of the size of the dining room. We have been holding it down and admit only the older workers. [Interview with an officer of the National Malleable Steel Company (Cleveland, O.).]

This club was started by a Negro representative of the Employees' Representation Plan.

. . . I started the club myself as soon as I was elected a representative. At the first meeting I invited sixty men and forty of them showed up, also the manager and assistant manager, together with about ninety men. It was such a success that it was a shock to them. The next meeting was at the Phillis Wheatley house. We had as guests the manager, the employment manager, the paymaster and the company treasurer. At the picnic there were several foremen and superintendents. After the picnic the fellows got together and wanted to have a baseball game. I believe our whole salvation lies in our club which is social and educational. I believe an outside union would do us more harm than good. It would be made up of Bolsheviks and foreigners and as a result the colored man would be on the outside. The company is a very fair type. It is an organization that is dependable. [Interview (Cleveland, O.) August 10, 1934.]

Some of the workers had other notions about the club. One of the members remarked:

They have about one hundred men in there, and they meet in the company dining room. The company also gives them \$25.00 a month. With the \$25.00 the company gives them and the amount they collect from the men we have about \$100.00 a month in the treasury. But there is a rule, that we have to spend it and they see to it that we do not save anything. I suggested that we buy coal by the carloads and sell it to the members cheaper, but the president of the club, who is by the way secretary of the representative organ-

ization, was against this. [Interview (Cleveland, O.) August 5, 1934.]

Not all of the workers believe these organizations serve purely social ends or that companies are interested only in the social life of the employees. "Some fellows think," stated the president of the club in Cleveland, "this is a salve to heal a sore." [Interview (Cleveland, O.), August 10, 1934.] In Clairton, Pennsylvania, a worker remarked, "They tried to fix that mushball field to satisfy the working class people. They give us discounts on railroad fare to the World's Fair. Things like this are to pacify us." [Interview (Clairton, Pa.), June 11, 1934.]

Many large companies have exploited the southern background of their Negro workers. In assuming an apparent interest in the social lives of the workers, they have seemed to adopt the parental attitude toward the entire community which is characteristic of southern Negro-white relations. Such gestures as sending turkeys at Christmas, getting people out of jail, or taking up collections from the men in the plant to help a sick worker indicate a deliberate effort to reinforce this (ostensible) pattern. The general foreman of one of the Carnegie plants told this story:

A colored fellow got arrested a while back and he wanted to get a letter of character from me. So I wrote him one as I knew the judge for a long time and the judge let him out. Then he came back and told the other fellows, "Mr. —— sure can help you if you get in jail; he is the Court." They appreciate those things. Of course we have a few malcontents, some that we can't sell our idea to. But you have them every place. [Interview (Clairton, Pa.) June 13, 1934.]

Among some southern Negroes, accustomed only to the plantation pattern of social relationships, these gestures of good will and interest obtain the desired response. A Negro welfare worker in the Pittsburgh district recalled what he termed a typical incident illustrating the appreciation of colored workers for the kind treatment they received from the company.

Last winter a Negro worker came in for relief. I talked to him about the union and he said that he was against it. I asked him why and he said, "Last winter when the snow was on the ground and there was no money in the house the company fed me and gave me milk for my babies. I would be an ingrate to bite the hand that is feeding me." [Interview (Homestead, Pa.) July 6, 1934.]

"There was a time," stated a Negro worker in Cleveland, "when they made plenty of money and took care of their men. They are loyal to their colored help. They have helped them in hospitals and made loans." [Interview (Cleveland, O.).]

THE NEGRO CHURCH

Financial contribution to various Negro organizations has proven advantageous to industrial concerns in enlisting the allegiance of Negroes and in making them more susceptible to manipulation by the company. In support of his opinion that the company really had the interests of the Negro at heart, a member of an Employees' Representative Plan related:

At the Phillis Wheatley House, Miss H—— made an appeal for money for the Association. A few days later the superintendent showed me a letter where he sent ten dollars to the Phillis Wheatley in consideration of the work they were doing for the Negro girls. [Interview (Cleveland, O.) August 10, 1934.]

The Negro church has received more attention from plant officials than any other institution in the community. The sympathy of colored preachers for industrial management is of long standing. Their antagonism toward labor unions may be traced to ignorance of union aims and principles but other members of the profession are frankly opportunistic. For some time they have looked upon the companies as sources of revenue and in terms of self interest alone have usually refused to do anything which might jeopardize this source of income. *The Negro in Chicago* reported:

The union organizer in the steel strike, W. Z. Foster, stated that at one of the conferences held by the Commission that, after an ad-

dress to the Negro steel workers at a church in Pittsburgh, the Negro preacher had said to him: "It nearly broke up the congregation, but we decided you were going to speak here in this church." The organizer continued: "Then I got the underneath of all this thing and found that this church had lost a donation of \$2,500 from the Steel Corporation for allowing me to speak. They had tried to block my speech to these colored workers in Pittsburgh. Whenever it's a question of a donation to a poor, struggling church like that, we know what usually happens."¹⁶

A preacher in Gary analyzed in realistic terms the relationship existing between many Negro churches and the United States Steel Corporation.

Because the company controls this city, there are few of us who are not afraid to go against the wishes of Mr. ——, who runs this town. To work here you must work for some part of the mill directly or indirectly. . . . There is no way the colored have to say anything against this. . . . When I came here I attempted to establish a Presbyterian Church. We asked the company for \$5,000 and they gave us \$500. What has happened is that the churches have become subsidiaries of the steel corporation and the ministers dare not get up and say anything against the company. Since companies have gained control of the city churches, they have ceased to give money for the past four years. [Interview (Gary, Ind.) August 23, 1934.]

Another Gary preacher revealed the steel company's dictatorial control over the program of the churches. This minister realized fully his role in the situation and was somewhat apologetic for having to follow company orders.

Yes, the steel companies have been willing to help us. They have aided most of the churches in a material way. The establishment of this agency [a social center] was brought about through the joint enterprise of the company and the church. The company was not satisfied with the program of the churches. So out of the proposal of the company they bought this property and said they would share dollars in the erection of this building. They have co-operated in the activities. . . . I don't want you to think that I am a tool for the company, but there are circumstances that. . . . [Interview (Gary, Ind.) August 27, 1934.]

¹⁶ *The Negro in Chicago*, p. 427.

One of the workers said of this clergyman:

Reverend _____ runs the Settlement House. He is a "stool-pigeon" for the company and is close to Mr. _____. He has fed many people during the depression and the company has helped him. Around 1927 and 1928 the colored had a club that met in the Settlement House and of course Reverend _____ was always present and would keep the company posted. He is still getting assistance from the company. He is the only colored man that can go into Mr. _____ [a steel company official] office at any time. [Interview (Gary, Ind.) August 28, 1934.]

Another Gary preacher stated:

In 1919 the company tried to get a Negro sub-division, and they wanted me to put my church there, and because I refused, they have never helped me at all.

During the campaign to organize the steel industry, both the A.A. and later the C.I.O. met with the resistance of the Negro church as has been mentioned before. However, the C.I.O. has perhaps not suffered from the antagonism of the Negro clergy to quite as great an extent as has the A.A. One C.I.O. union reported:

All we have met from the Negro preacher . . . is discouragement. They don't seem to care anything about the low wages and bad working conditions their people suffer, nor the feudal condition which exists in the plants here. [Interview (Gary, Ind.) August 29, 1934.]

While this statement is quite generally descriptive of the attitude of the Negro ministry throughout the country, there have been noteworthy exceptions. In nearly all of the important steel producing centers there was usually one minister who espoused the union cause. At the conference of Negro steel workers which was held in Pittsburgh in February of 1937 the following ministers attended: Doctor King of Pittsburgh, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church; Rev. L. R. Mitchell, president of the Ministers' Alliance of Chicago and Indiana Harbor; Doctor J. C. Austin, pastor of the Pilgrim Baptist Church of Chicago; and Bishop W. A. Walls, A.M.E. Zion Church, Chicago.

Bishop Walls, in addressing the conference, stated in regard to the attitude of Negro ministers toward union organization:

You must not spend your time criticizing Negro preachers. You educated them; they must stand by you. All you have to do is to organize and tell them so, and if they don't want your organization in the church you men go down the aisle on Sunday and say to that preacher: "If you eat my bread the time has come when my minister must stand by my toils and my struggle to put bread and meat in my children's mouths, and if you don't do that we don't want your gospel because it is not Christ's."¹⁷

Since the financial resources of the Negro people were so limited, many of the social service organizations of the Negro community were necessarily supported by white philanthropists. These institutions have on occasion been used to defeat union organization and quell the unrest among Negro workers by directing dissatisfaction into the safe channels afforded by company dominated organizations. *The Negro in Chicago* noted in this connection:

Many labor leaders and union members believe that welfare clubs, company Y. M. C. A.'s, glee clubs, and athletic clubs are encouraged and supported by employers as a substitute for a form of organization which they cannot control. The subsidizing of social movements and churches is regarded as one of the means employed by large employers to insure this reserve of strike breakers.¹⁸

The Wabash Avenue [Negro] branch of the Y. M. C. A. in Chicago cooperated with a number of industrial firms in developing the so-called Efficiency Clubs.

The work of the Efficiency Clubs of Armour & Company, the International Harvester Company, Morris & Company, Swift & Company, Wilson & Company, Pullman Car Shops, Corn Products Refining Company, has brought about a sense of responsibility on the part of the industrial worker and sympathetic understanding and good will on the part of company officials.¹⁹

¹⁷ Speech given before the Convention of Negro Steel Workers.

¹⁸ *The Negro in Chicago*, p. 427.

¹⁹ George R. Arthur, "The Young Men's Christian Association Movement Among Negroes," *Opportunity*, I (March, 1923), 16-18.

These organizations, like the company unions, were allowed more or less to pass out of existence during the first years of the depression but, with the coming of the union movement in 1933, they were rather hastily revived. That these clubs are dominated by the companies is substantiated by the remarks of one of the club officials, who was questioned by the investigator concerning the nature and function of these organizations.

We have decided that you had better get your information from the companies. We have always found the company to be fair to the men and we feel that all information regarding these clubs should come from the companies themselves. [Interview (Chicago, Ill.) January 11, 1934.]

THE NEGRO PRESS

The Negro press has not been active in encouraging Negroes to join unions nor has it dealt at any great length with the problems of the Negro and trade unionism. The pages of most Negro papers, like those of most daily papers, are filled with news about crime, sex, politics, sports, and social functions. Such labor news as does appear usually consists of articles exposing discrimination against Negroes by labor organizations. For example, in August of 1934, the *Birmingham World* reported in a large caption "Race Loses Out in Frisco Ship Strike Settlement." The article read in part:

The hopes of several hundred Negro strikebreakers to retain their jobs or secure other type of employment on the docks, "went the way of all flesh" yesterday, when the officials of the International Longshoremen's Association demanded that all strikebreakers be discharged, especially Negroes, or they would refuse to return to their jobs. [Interview (Chicago, Ill.) August 7, 1934.]

Another caption, in a Norfolk paper ran "New York Saleslady Made Victim of Racial Prejudice by Labor Union."²⁹ Any discriminatory act on the part of the American Federation of Labor is considered to have great news value. Under the caption, "Urban League Condemns Jim Crow in Labor Ranks," the

²⁹ *Journal and Guide*, June 23, 1935.

Journal and Guide reported the entire National Conference of the Urban League.

When a prominent business or civic leader addresses a Negro group, the account of his talk is often printed in detail regardless of his attitude toward unionism. When one of Ford's social workers spoke to a Negro group in Detroit the *Afro-American* under the caption, "Ford Manager Calls Union's Enemy—Unions Worst Enemy of the Negro—Ford," reported:

If the automobile factories in Detroit ever fall under the control of the American Federation of Labor and its affiliates, it will mean the closing of the door to the Negro laborers.

This was the statement made by Donald J. Marshall of the St. Antoine Y. M. C. A. Sunday. Mr. Marshall is connected with the employment office of the Ford Motor Company, the largest employer of Negro labor in the world. It is believed he spoke with the backing of Mr. Ford. All Negro labor must come through the hands of Mr. Marshall.

The speaker declared that an effort is now being made to organize the automobile workers in Detroit. He stated that a large number of Negro workers had already aligned themselves with this union movement, thinking that this is the way to employment.

If Detroit had been a union city, there would not be 4,600 Negroes employed at the Ford Motor Company, Mr. Marshall stated. The unions would control the shops, and he would not have been in a position to have hired the Negro laborer.²¹

These articles present but one side of the union question to the Negro community. Many of the papers, like the reform organizations, are strongly race conscious and envisage the entire situation from the point of view of equal rights. To them it is more "newsworthy" to play up discriminations exercised by certain unions than to show that some unions are anxious to have Negroes as members. During the entire campaign to organize steel workers under the N.R.A., there was little or no labor news in important Negro papers. Just before the threatened steel strike in 1934, there was not a single news item concerning the situation in any of the four leading Negro papers although

²¹ January 13, 1934.

many thousands of Negroes would have been affected by the strike.

Editorial comments of these papers reflect a similar lack of information and voice the old fears concerning white workers. The *Pittsburgh Courier* stated editorially:

Judging by the past (which is all we have to judge by) the Black worker will strike as readily, stay out as long and picket as regularly as anybody else, but all of the time he will want to know that he is not being made the "goat" to be cast aside; discriminated against by the white union when the battle is won. White labor has been in the habit of doing that.²²

The *Afro-American* of Baltimore, Maryland, noted:

Unless the A. F. of L. is able to make its locals throughout the country open their doors to colored members in all crafts, it may be necessary for colored labor to organize and join in a country-wide fight on the unions.²³

What would seem to be a more progressive attitude appears in an editorial in another leading Negro newspaper:

Too large a part of the time, attention and talents of Negro organizations have in the past been spent trying to re-mould the views of white capitalists and too little to remoulding the views of white proletarians, which is far more important. That some unions practice segregation and discrimination is no more reason for completely washing our hands of them than it is for not dealing with the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A., the Catholic and Protestant churches, bankers, industrialists and merchants.²⁴

Although most of the lack of attention paid to labor and the bias against labor organizations arises honestly as a reaction of an intensely race conscious group toward acts of discrimination, nevertheless, there is evidence of outright corruption on the part of some few of the Negro papers. When large industrial interests exert as much control over the daily press of the country as they do, it is not to be expected that the Negro press would entirely escape their influence. An instance in Chicago

²² June 9, 1934.

²³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 14, 1934.

²⁴ April 19, 1934.

which involved the Pullman Porters' union and a Negro paper illustrates this aspect of the situation.

After supporting the organization of the Pullman Porters in 1925, the *Chicago Whip* suddenly began to attack the union. The attack was directed ostensibly against the discriminative practices and paradoxically plutocratic and communistic principles of the American Federation of Labor with which the Pullman Porters were affiliated. In fact, the argument ran, most labor unions were not free of "Kleagles and Goblins of the Ku Klux Klan" and furthermore the Pullman Porters' organization did not believe in God.²⁵ These arguments were answered by A. Philip Randolph in the *Messenger*.

You know and everybody else knows . . . that you are not opposing the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters because you think it is connected with the American Federation of Labor. That's merely a reason, not the reason. . . . Your real reason is the advertising you are getting from the Pullman Company to oppose the movement.

Without the slightest compunctions or scruples, you are willing to betray and sell out your race for a miserable mess of pottage.

Have you so soon forgotten that at the banquet of the porters, at the Wage Conference in 1923, you advocated organization, that you urged them in the *Whip* to organize?²⁶

Later, one of the men connected with the *Whip* told the story of the change in policy of the paper in more detail:

Yes, after 1925 there was a change in the policy of the *Whip*. It came about in this way. To save the stockholders who had invested in the *Whip* we made a deal with Insull. In this deal Insull took over about \$21,000 worth of stock. Then this necessitated the changing of our policy. Later when Insull's lawyer became the lawyer for the Pullman Company we had to change our policy toward the Pullman Porters' union. Before, we had been favoring it and we just had to pick out something and fight it. We just had to make a reason for being against it. There was an exposé in the *Messenger*, but it was only half the truth. They never did know the whole story. [Interview (Chicago, Ill.) February 28, 1933.]

²⁵ October 15, 1925.

²⁶ "A Reply to Joe D. Bibb," 'Idiot-or' of the Chicago 'Flip,' mis-named the 'Whip.'" *The Messenger*, VII (December, 1925), 378.

While the Negro press in general ignored, or was unaware of the organizational campaign in 1934, the C.I.O. was news which no other papers could afford to overlook. Sometime after the C.I.O. had become a national issue of some consequence, Negro papers finally began to note its attitude toward colored workers. In the *Chicago Defender* there appeared over a period of a few months fifteen or twenty articles which reported C.I.O. news. A prominent place was given to notices of mass meetings and one large picture was published which showed Van A. Bittner of the Chicago area of the S.W.O.C., surrounded by a corps of Negro steel organizers.

Perhaps the paper which paid most attention to the movement was the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Robert L. Vann, editor of the *Courier*, was very sympathetic toward the C.I.O. He stated, at a meeting of Negro steel workers in Pittsburgh:

... I tell you that this effort to organize Negroes in the steel industry is going to be largely hampered in this district at least by Negroes who will be paid by this very industry and I serve notice on you now that I shall expose to the reading public the name and address and the mother and father of any Negro I can find who does that.²⁷

The best reporting on labor news came from George S. Schuyler who, as feature writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, toured the country in 1937 to find out what Negroes were doing in the labor movement.²⁸

The above illustrates the extent of the mechanisms which have been employed to control public opinion in the Negro community and the role of some of the important institutions in consciously or unconsciously assisting this end. We will now examine some of the national organizations to see just what part they are likely to play in the struggle between union or non-union forces.

²⁷ Speech given before the Convention of Negro Steel Workers, Pittsburgh, Pa.

²⁸ The author found this series of articles very helpful and has made considerable use of them and wishes to acknowledge the help which Mr. Schuyler's writing has been to him.

NATIONAL NEGRO ORGANIZATIONS

It is important in this discussion to take into consideration the various national organizations maintained by Negroes, for these organizations attempt to define for the community the objectives and aims which should be worked for; and to analyze and interpret the world of events and the position of the Negro within this larger setting. In this discussion it will be possible to consider only the three most important of these organizations—the National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National Negro Congress. Both the Urban League and the N.A.A.C.P. are reform groups, organized on a national scale and supported by a relatively small section of the Negro population—the Negro upper class. Since Negro workers have developed no strong organizations of their own, the Urban League and the N.A.A.C.P. have been almost the only Negro organizations, until recently, which have articulated any point of view on labor problems. Thus they have been able to speak as if they represented the entire Negro group. The National Negro Congress represents a relatively recent attempt to organize the entire Negro community in a broad “progressive united front” movement.

The Urban League

In 1906, William H. Baldwin, Jr., president of the Long Island Railroad and president of the General Education Board, formed an organization called “The Committee for Improving the Industrial Conditions of Negroes in New York City.” In the same year Miss Frances Kellor formed “The League for the Protection of Colored Women.” The purpose of this latter group was to assist colored girls and women in securing work and lodgings in the city of New York. In 1910 Mrs. William H. Baldwin, Jr., called a meeting in New York City of all social agencies interested in the Negro and formed an organization called “The Committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes in the City of New York.” In the interests of economy, these groups were merged in 1911 to form the “National Urban League.” All of these organizations had arisen as attempts to

deal with the acute problems affecting the Negro population in New York.²⁹ These problems were largely a function of the migration of large numbers of Negroes from the rural South to a metropolis (and the adjustments which this change involved) and the segregation of Negroes in New York into crowded, unhealthy residence districts in the city.

Today, the Urban League has a national office in New York and forty-two loosely connected branches which are practically autonomous. These branches are located in principal cities throughout the North. The national staff is comprised of 16 paid members and there are 184 paid workers in the 42 branches, thirty-two of which are located in community chest cities and are supported in part by local chest funds. The League is controlled by a national board and by local boards in each branch. There are 1,200 members on these boards; board members are usually prominent business men and civic leaders in the various communities. The national board exerts little control over the various local branches. Lack of centralized control is indeed one of the weaknesses of the organization.³⁰

Mrs. William H. Baldwin, Jr., who acted for some time as chairman of the national board, has expressed her notion of the purposes of the League as follows:

When we, colored and white people, banded together in our League, seek to better conditions among the Negroes of Harlem, or San Juan Hill, or Brooklyn, we seek also to make a better New York City for everybody to live in and to help in some measure towards a truer realization of the ideals of sound community living in our great republic.³¹

The aspirations of the League were set forth more explicitly perhaps by the national officers two decades ago.

²⁹ Paul E. Baker, *Negro-White Adjustment*, p. 21.

³⁰ In a regional conference, the following memorandum was given to local secretaries: "However, we have been handicapped several times in our efforts because we have not been able to present a combined front with our local organizations. The National cannot have the prestige when its efforts are weakened by the apathy and neglect of the local branch." (From a mimeographed sheet entitled "A Regional Conference Memorandum for Local Secretaries," September 3, 1933, p. 2.)

³¹ Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The objects of this organization are to bring about co-ordination and co-operation among existing agencies and organizations for improving the industrial, economic, social and spiritual conditions among Negroes and to develop other agencies and organizations where necessary; to secure and train Negro social workers; to make studies of the industrial, economic, social and spiritual conditions among Negroes, and in general to promote, encourage, assist and engage in any and all kinds of work for improving the industrial, economic, social and spiritual conditions among Negroes.²²

The original purpose of the League, then, was primarily to engage in social work. Its early activities were more or less confined to that field and it was not until later that the League became interested in the trade union movement.

The national office of the Urban League has, on several occasions, declared itself favorable to organized labor and has suggested, with some reservations, that Negro workers become union members. At the annual conference of the Urban League, held in Detroit in 1919, it was stated:

We believe in the principles of collective bargaining, and in the theory of co-operation between capital and labor in the settlement of industrial disputes and the management of industry, but in view of the present situation, we advise Negroes in seeking affiliation with any organized labor group to observe caution. We advise them to take jobs as strike breakers only where the union affected has excluded colored men from membership. We believe they should keep out of jobs offered in a struggle to deny labor a voice in the regulation of conditions under which it works.

But, we believe the Negroes should begin to think more and more in the terms of labor group movement, so as ultimately to reap the benefits of thinking in unison. To this end, we advise Negroes to organize with white men whenever conditions are favorable. Where this is not possible, they should band together to bargain with employers and with organized labor alike.²³

In 1918 the Urban League presented to Gompers, then president of the American Federation of Labor, a resolution re-

²² "A Regional Conference Memorandum for Local Secretaries," p. 1.

²³ Extracts from "A Way Out," A Suggested Solution of the Race Problem adopted at the Annual Conference of the National Urban League, Detroit, Michigan, October 15-19, 1919.

questing the Federation to take active steps to bring Negro workers into the fold of trade unionism. In 1920 the League again made a similar proposal. In 1925 the Industrial Relations Department of the League was organized and the director of the department approached the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor in an effort to encourage that body to undertake actively the organization of Negro workers. The League

. . . offered to raise one-half of the salary of a competent Negro who would work under [William Green's] direction in trying to smooth out the relationship between the colored workers and the various component national and international organizations, but [Green] informed [them] that the "Executive Council does not at this time feel that the American Federation of Labor can undertake to meet the expense which would be involved in carrying out [their] proposition."³⁴

In 1933, after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the League issued a statement concerning the Negro in trade unions.

It may be well to state that the Urban League believes in collective bargaining; that its policy with regard to the organization of Negro workers is based upon that principle rather than upon the recognition of any particular group of organized labor and that it believes in the organization of workers. . . . The Urban League's main interest is to establish the democracy of negotiation and compromise in industry as a substitute for the autocratic control that has made the adjustment of the workers difficult.³⁵

In regard to "left-wing" unions, the League was even more liberal.³⁶

³⁴ T. Arnold Hill, "Open Letter to Mr. William Green, President, American Federation of Labor," *Opportunity*, VIII (February, 1930), 57.

³⁵ "Interpretative Statement to Secretaries," mimeographed supplement to the National Urban League, A Regional Conference Memorandum for Local Secretaries, September 28, 1933, p. 2.

³⁶ The question might arise—should one encourage membership in the American Federation of Labor, in the left-wing unions of the Communist Party, or in the Socialist labor unions? This is entirely a matter of local consideration. In some instances, the left-wing unions remain the only ones

However, the activities of the Urban League have thus far been confined almost entirely to verbal statements of sympathy with the principles of unionism. It has never actually approached rank and file Negro workers in any attempt to form trade union organizations and has dealt only with high officials in the trade union movement. Its activities with respect to trade unionism, as described by the director of the Department of Industrial Relations, have consisted of sending resolutions and making various overtures of good will to the officials of the American Federation of Labor. As proof of their willingness to coöperate with the Federation, the Industrial Relations' director stated:

We have supported the cause of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, we have contributed articles to the *Federationist* and you have contributed an article to our magazine *Opportunity*. We have invited you to speak before our National convention on more than one occasion.²⁷

That the League considers itself purely an advisory body, rather than an active participant in trade unionism, is evident from the instructions given to local secretaries in regard to the organization of labor encouraged by the National Industrial Recovery Act.

The League does not believe that Local Secretaries should become union organizers. They may bring the men together for the purpose of organization, they may encourage it in every way, but the organization should be left to the union officials and to the men themselves.²⁸

It has been easy for the national office to make liberal gestures and to voice trade union principles. The branches, how-

in which one may expect the development of this bargaining power among Negro workers. . . . In the main, however, the most highly developed form of labor organization expressing this policy of collective bargaining is found in the regular American labor unions, such as those affiliated with the American Federation of Labor." (*Ibid.*, p. 3.)

²⁷ Hill, "Open Letter to Mr. William Green, President, American Federation of Labor," *Opportunity*, VIII (February, 1930), 57.

²⁸ "Interpretative Statement to Secretaries," p. 3.

ever, faced with a conservative and often reactionary board of business men and social workers, pressed by the necessity of soliciting money and remaining on good terms with the administrators of the community funds, and attempting to establish a "social work" attitude among business men (the success of which program depended upon the good will of the employing group) have found it necessary to compromise time after time on matters of labor policy. It is not that local officers are necessarily more reactionary than the national officers but rather that they are faced with the day-to-day problem and conflicts which are inevitable in an organization which is supported by capitalist interests, even though its program may be dedicated to the welfare of workers. No association which actively participated in a program to organize labor would long receive the support either of a community chest or of individual business men in any American community. The local secretaries have sensed this situation and, since also most of them have had little or no experience or training in the problems of labor organization, they have tended to emphasize exclusively the social work program of the Urban League.

But labor problems cannot always be ignored and in controversial situations it has often been necessary for the League to assume a stand. Although the Urban League has no real mass following, many Negro workers have looked to it for leadership in times of industrial crisis. Also, business interests which have supported the League have exerted numerous claims upon the organization during periods of labor disturbance. The Negro laborer, untrained in union tactics or principles, seldom makes articulate demands for unions. With no pressure from the workers, the secretaries often saw no reason to sacrifice their program and the financial support of their branch to the idealistic principles of trade unionism. "The character of the League differed from city to city, but everywhere the outstanding characteristic of its policy was opportunism."⁸⁹ The League, existing largely by virtue of the financial support of the employing class and at the same time trying to maintain

⁸⁹ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 140.

its face with labor organizations, has on several occasions made verbal statements in support of trade unions and then sponsored counter-activities in critical situations.

An example of this is to be found in the behavior of the Chicago Urban League during the controversy over the Negro Pullman Porters' movement. The controversy arose in 1926 and was coincident with the League's annual drive for funds. Eugene K. Jones, executive secretary of the National League, publicly endorsed the porters' organization. Immediately after his statement appeared in print, the Pullman Company called the Chicago Urban League and asked whether "Mr. Jones was speaking for the whole Urban League or merely expressing his personal viewpoint." The Chicago officers explained that the National League had no control over the various branches nor did it attempt to dictate their policy. After this clarifying statement "the Pullman Company made its contribution."⁴⁰

The branches of the League have often justified injudicious interference in strikes on the grounds that they could not in any event have succeeded. Thus one writer defends the strike-breaking activities of the League (and Y. M. C. A.) in the stockyards strike in Chicago with the following argument:

The writer recently heard a colored stock yards union man bitterly denouncing the Urban League and the Y. M. C. A. for what he thought was their interference in the stock yards strike. His denunciation was bitter and typically union as any the writer has ever heard, but the writer knew that with 20,000 Negroes unemployed over a period of years in a great city like Chicago, where at all times the struggle for existence is keen, that the calling of the strike was pure folly, and that no force, social or otherwise, could have saved the situation to the union. If the statements of the stock yards officials may be accepted, the strikebreakers were about equally divided between white and colored men who preferred the danger of a strikebreakers' position to the suffering incident to unemployment.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

⁴¹ William L. Evans, "The Negro in Chicago Industries," *Opportunity*, I (February, 1923), 15-16.

The important aspect of this case is that Negroes were members of the union and that it was a colored union worker who spoke against the activities of the League.

The National Urban League took no active part in the attempt to organize the steel industry during the N.R.A. period, in spite of the fact that steel was probably the most important single industry in the country employing Negroes and that Negroes were solicited to join the union on terms of equality. No explanation was offered by the national office for this lack of interest but it was again stated that the League did, and always had, supported organized labor.

The National Urban League did not advise Negroes with respect to their union procedure in connection with the attempt of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers to enlarge its membership.

The policy of the organization has been for a long while, and still is, that of encouraging Negroes to affiliate themselves with organized labor. In 1919 we declared this position in a public statement. Since then at intervals we have made known the same policy. At our Regional Conferences held last year and the year before we issued pronouncements to this same effect. [Interview, August 10, 1934.]

Various local branches took different attitudes toward the attempt to organize steel. The Pittsburgh branch of the League was busy making a survey of employment among Negroes on federal funds and did not know the extent of union organization in that important steel district. Until the time of the strike threat, the League had done nothing to determine the degree to which Negroes participated in the union movement or to aid in their organization.

The Cleveland League played a reactionary role and was even instrumental in breaking up an incipient union. Most of the Negro workers in that city were afraid to join the Amalgamated Association. One of the colored workers decided that it would be better to organize the Negroes in his plant separately than to have no organization at all but he was opposed by an officer of the Urban League.

I made an attempt to organize Negro workers, but as usual there was a lot of talk about it. We had a meeting on Sunday and on Monday the general foreman called me in. He asked me what we were organizing for, and I told him I was not trying to start a union but a social club where we could get together and meet each other. What I really wanted to do was to find out what the other men were talking and thinking about. I thought that if we could organize a club and make a strong enough organization we could just have a union over night and no one would be the wiser.

C_____, of the Urban League, was altogether against my organization. He didn't want things done in that way. But he did favor the club which was organized within the plant. That isn't what I wanted. Because the way it is now, the superintendent of the plant is an honorary president and some officers of the company sit in at all of our meetings and hear everything that we have to say. I don't know why C____ wanted it that way. When I asked him he said that he thought we should take up our problems with the management. [Interview (Cleveland, O.) August 10, 1934.]

The executive secretary of the Negro Welfare Association (a branch of the Urban League) had been called by the general manager of one of the steel companies and told that "some dissatisfaction" had been stirred up among the Negro workers. After the industrial secretary visited the plant, Mr. C____ (the executive secretary) called the workers into his office to find "their difficulties and to reason with them and notify the company of the conditions which the Association found that needed correction." [Interview with staff members of the Negro Welfare Association, Cleveland.] By such interference the Negro Welfare Association broke up this feeble attempt to organize.

"Our local organizations," stated T. Arnold Hill, director of the Department of Industrial Relations for the national office, "have frequently had occasion to enlist the support of Negro workers on behalf of union activities."⁴² This statement certainly did not apply to the activities of the Chicago Urban League during the recent attempt to organize the steel industry. So antagonistic was that organization that its officers not only

⁴² From a letter to the author, September 13, 1934.

refused to aid the campaign but actively worked against it. Their industrial secretary wrote:

The Chicago Urban League is not in favor of this strike. But at the same time it has not found it necessary to be active in advising workers not to strike, inasmuch as almost all of the Negro workers contacted in the Gary and Chicago area had absolutely no intention of striking.⁴³

He did not favor the strike because he felt that:

Strikers have absolutely no chance of winning the strike, and it will mean tremendous loss of pay and possibly loss of jobs in the event that strike breakers are brought in. Secondly, since this is a strike primarily for union recognition and the union refuses to recognize Negroes (i.e., generally speaking) I fail to see why the Negro should jeopardize his chance of a job by striking for the recognition of the A. F. of L. The company attitude has of course been to employ Negroes.⁴⁴

The following statement epitomizes the opportunistic philosophy of the Chicago Urban League:

Since the company has in the past advanced Negroes from the status of common laborers to semi-skilled and skilled positions, the probability is that they will continue to do so. In talking with the company officials, I have been assured that they will continue this policy and that the loyalty on the part of the Negro workers will be rewarded.

Therefore . . . if the Negro supports the A. F. of L., he will probably wind up by finding himself definitely excluded from the best jobs, and if the A. F. of L. organizes the industry, introducing a closed shop, the companies will no longer be able to continue their policy to employ Negroes to offset collective bargaining, and the incentive for the employment of Negroes will be lessened.

On the other hand, if the Negro exercises his position as a minority group and plays the management against the remaining workers, he will get more thereby.

I would go further and even suggest Negroes go in as strike-breakers, provided they were retained when the strike was over.⁴⁵

⁴³ From a letter, June 26, 1934.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* See Chapter X for a description of the Amalgamated's attempt to attract Negro membership.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

The secretary outlined the program of the League, which doubtless meant the Negro Workers' Councils of the National Urban League, as follows:

Of course, I don't think conditions in steel are ideal, but I simply feel that the Negro should go along with the company this time.

I am organizing Councils of Steel Workers in order to advise and help them advance as much as possible in the industry.⁴⁶

The industrial secretary of the branch wrote to the Secretary of Labor as follows:

We see then that although the open shop policy of the steel corporation may not on the whole be considered beneficial to labor, nevertheless, it has offered occupational opportunities to Negroes. And, in fact, the standard of living of the Negroes in the steel industry is much higher than the average for the Negro workers as a whole. It seems, then, that although conditions at present may be far from ideal, nevertheless, the Negro worker has definitely benefited under the open shop policy of the steel corporations. And any departure from this policy should be carefully examined to determine whether it would increase or decrease these benefits.

The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers is now demanding recognition by the steel industries and is asking that the government intercede in its behalf. Having carefully investigated the efforts of the Amalgamated to organize the steel workers we are forced to take the position that the organization of the industry by the A. F. of L. will greatly decrease employment opportunities for Negroes. Therefore, we feel that the administration should not intercede in behalf of the union, especially since the union is discriminating against Negro workers, and the Negro as a sub-standard worker definitely merits the protection of the government.

* * * * *

Our investigation indicates that many Negro steel workers have not been invited to join the union by the union organizers.

... we have presented this memorandum and hope that you will not take any action which might unfavorably affect the future of the Negro worker.⁴⁷

"Ibid. The Workers' Councils of the Urban League are referred to in Chapter XX.

⁴⁶ Letter sent to the Hon. Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, by the industrial secretary of the Chicago Urban League, June 23, 1934. The

Throughout the country only one League branch, as far as the author is aware, helped in the drive for union membership under the N.R.A. In St. Louis, after the passage of the blanket code, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen attempted to organize the meat packing industry. The League was asked for assistance in getting Negroes interested in the union. The industrial secretary of that branch addressed several union meetings. From his point of view: "The League envisages the unions as the only way out. When we find a union that is O.K., we back it. . . ." [Interview (St. Louis, Mo.) November 21, 1934.] But even in this instance the executive secretary was not sure of his ground.

If Negroes get in an industry in large numbers, the A. F. of L. calls for organization. As soon as they are organized the union gets together and arbitrarily figures that the number of Negroes in the industry is too large, and they gradually reduce the percentage of Negroes until they squeeze most of them out and give the white men their jobs. [Interview (St. Louis, Mo.) November 21, 1934.]

With the advent of the C.I.O. the National Urban League, although at first it was both apathetic and rather suspicious, later took a more active part in the movement. Lester B. Granger, secretary of the Workers' Bureau of the National Urban League, cautioned Negro workers against a headlong rush into the ranks of the C.I.O. However, the attitude was considerably changed within a few months after the committee had begun to function actively. In 1937 Granger wrote:

A more modern social intelligence has been shown by C.I.O. leadership than that shown by the old time A. F. of L. leaders. Steel, Auto, Mine and Garment Workers' Unions have shown great concern not only for the defense of civil rights, but also for protecting the welfare of the unemployed and for organizing the unorganized.

writer of this letter explained: "This letter, of course, only represents the stand taken by our department. And I suppose I should inform you that Mr. T. Arnold Hill of the National office is not in accord with the contents of my letter, and feels rather strongly that I should not have committed this office to the open shop policy of the steel industry." (Letter, October 16, 1934.)

Since Negroes furnish so large a proportion of the unorganized, the unemployed, and those whose civil rights are violated, they are quick to see in the C.I.O. an instrument of deep importance to their race—a new champion to defend the rights of the underdog.⁴⁸

At the Pittsburgh conference of Negro steel workers, T. Arnold Hill, stated:

I can assure you . . . wholehearted support of our national organization [the Urban League], and that we are with you 100 per cent in this drive to get Negroes into the Steel Workers' Union.⁴⁹

On the important question of racial discrimination, a national officer of the League stated: "We have not been able to observe instances of discrimination against Negro membership in the C.I.O."⁵⁰ However, Hill stated that he thought that the C.I.O. might "go in a little deeper for Negro members than it has."

However, . . . the C.I.O. has been shortsighted because it has failed to utilize the existing channels of information to reach the Negro. It should call one or more persons to advise and consult as to ways and means of getting more Negro members.

So far as the National Urban League is concerned, we are wholeheartedly in favor of Negro organization and are in many directions working to bring this about.⁵¹

Also there has been a decidedly more cooperative attitude demonstrated toward the C.I.O. and its attempt to organize the steel workers by the branches of the League than has ever been extended to the Amalgamated Association. Perhaps the most active pro-C.I.O. branches have been those in New York and St. Louis. The Industrial Department of the St. Louis branch, under the direction of Sidney Williams and Arnold Walker, has actively aided union organization not only in steel and meat packing but in all other fields including the skilled crafts. These men were also responsible for the formation of the St. Louis Negro Labor Congress to inform and guide the bewildered Ne-

⁴⁸ Lester B. Granger, "New Trade Union Movement of the Negro," *Workers' Council Bulletin*, No. 18.

⁴⁹ *Steel Labor*, II (February 10, 1937), 5.

⁵⁰ Letter to the author, December 29, 1937 (from Reginald A. Johnson).

⁵¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 19, 1937.

gro workers in the field of union organization. As one observer stated: "The Negro educated class, as a whole, is lying low, indifferent or outspokenly anti-union. By comparison, the Urban League of this city is radical in its labor interests and activities."¹¹¹

Branches of the League in other cities have shown a varying amount of interest and activity in the problem of organizing Negro workers under the C.I.O. The Chicago branch changed, to an extent, its attitude and A. L. Foster, executive secretary of the branch, made a public statement in support of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee. He appeared (with Van A. Bittner, director of the Chicago area) on the program of a mass meeting to draw more workers into the union.

In general, it may be said that the National Urban League and most of its branches have felt much more friendly and have been willing to coöperate more fully with the C.I.O. and the S.W.O.C. than they have been with the Amalgamated Association. However, in this drive as in the one under the N.R.A., the Urban League cannot be said to have played on the whole an active or an aggressive part in encouraging Negroes to join unions. The activities of the League are still confined to making rather general favorable statements and to some form of workers' education.

Clearly the Urban League is an organization which cannot and should not attempt to assume leadership in the trade union movement. It was organized and equipped to function in the field of social service. It is only because the Negro community has not developed any labor organization that the League has been forced to step in and play a leading role at the time of industrial difficulties. In the field of social work it does commendable and important work but the control of the employing class makes it ineffectual in trade union matters. The League has often muddled important issues by interjecting into them the social service instead of the trade union point of view. If it attempts to assume leadership in the labor organization under its present control, it may in some localities at least, again as

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

in the past be used as a weapon against a militant trade union movement.

The N.A.A.C.P.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is essentially a civil rights organization; its sole significance in the labor movement lies in the fact that it agitates for civil rights in the industrial field. These are its objectives:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People seeks to uplift the colored men and women of this country by securing to them the full enjoyment of their rights as citizens, justice in all courts and equality of opportunity everywhere.⁵³

The Association has focused its attention on cases of discrimination within the labor movement rather than on active organization of workers. Its chief instrument of rectification has been the court, an institution which has not been an asset in the attempt to further union organization. It is unlikely that the Association could function in the labor movement in any way other than to influence public opinion in both Negro and white communities. Its administrative equipment is inadequate; the paid staff consists of only twenty-six workers. All other officers in the 325 branches are volunteers.⁵⁴ None of these people have been trained in labor work and are for the most part upper class Negro citizens who are not directly interested in organizing Negro laborers.

On various occasions the Association has made efforts to coöperate with the American Federation of Labor. The 1924 convention of the Association sent an open letter offering to provide half the funds for an investigation of the problems of the Negro worker. In 1929 it made another approach to the Federation, this time in connection with the attempt to organize southern labor.

⁵³ Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, issued January 1, 1911. According to Mr. Paul Baker, "The N. A. A. C. P. has dealt more with the legal and political aspects of the race question than has any agency with the possible exception of the American Civil Liberties Union" (*Op. cit.*, p. 45.)

⁵⁴ Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Upon learning of the plan of the American Federation of Labor to organize in the South, the N.A.A.C.P. telegraphed the A. F. of L. annual meeting during October in Toronto, Canada, as follows:

Press dispatches state American Federation of Labor will discuss Tuesday unionization of South. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People renews its appeal that colored workers be fully and completely included in your program, inasmuch as labor problems in South can never be satisfactorily adjusted with Negroes excluded from unions. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also renews offer to appoint joint committee with American Federation of Labor for purpose of investigation needs of colored workers and working out plan for unionization.

No direct reply was received from the A. F. of L., but it was noted subsequently in the public press that the plans for organization in the South did include organization of Negro workers.⁵⁵

During the recent attempt to organize industrial workers under the impetus of the N.R.A., the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People did nothing at all to encourage Negroes to join. The position of the Association is stated in a letter from Roy Wilkins, assistant secretary of the national office:

When the New Deal Program was launched, we realized as did all other persons interested in the labor movement that Section 7-A of the National Industrial Recovery Act was a powerful weapon for the workers if they would use it and fight for the correct interpretation of it. We came shortly to realize, however, that while the American Federation of Labor was seizing upon Section 7-A to carry on the most stupendous drive for membership in its history, it was doing little or nothing to include Negroes in the organizing. As a matter of fact, we strongly suspect, although we cannot prove, that A. F. of L. unions have attempted to use Section 7-A to drive Negroes out of certain occupations.

The strategy was to organize a union for collective bargaining, to claim the right to speak for all the workers, and then to either agree with the employers to push Negroes out of the industry or,

⁵⁵ Twentieth Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for 1929 (New York City, January, 1930), p. 23.

having effected an agreement with the employer, to proceed to make the union lily-white.

For this reason and for others which have come up in the history of the A. F. of L. we refrained from sending out any special word to Negro workers on the A. F. of L. We did tackle the A. F. of L. itself at the outset of the New Deal program communicating personally and by letter with Mr. MacGrady and Mr. Green.

We believe that the A. F. of L. is beginning to see the light. We believe that it is now up to the Negro workers to test the A. F. of L. pronouncements of no Jim Crow by seeking membership in all unions and by bringing to the fore all cases of discrimination within the unions.

It is not easy for an Association which knows so intimately the raw deals that have been given Negro labor by the A. F. of L. to get out and shout from the housetops to Negro workers urging them to affiliate. At the same time we realize that affiliation would be best for all concerned provided one did not have just as great a battle after getting in the union as one had on the outside.⁴⁴

The growth of the C.I.O. resulted in the development of two rather opposed points of view within the Association. As the C.I.O. did not practice racial discrimination, the more liberal elements of the Association were very favorable toward Negro participation in the movement. However, the more conservative members of the Association were prone to be antagonistic to the C.I.O. on the grounds that it was a radical organization. It was only after some debate that the liberal members were able to obtain permission for Homer Martin, president of the United Automobile Workers, to address the national convention of the N.A.A.C.P. in Detroit.

The local organizations were, for the most part, opposed to the movement. The president of the Association in Chicago (in 1937) was violently opposed to the C.I.O. which he characterized as a Communist organization. George Schuyler has attributed to the head of the local N.A.A.C.P. in Indianapolis the statement that, "I have come to the conclusion Negroes had better stay out of the union." In Detroit, Michigan, the same antagonisms were found. Although in a few instances the Na-

⁴⁴ Correspondence with the author, October 30, 1934.

tional Association or one of its branches has called attention to some form of discrimination which a union has been practicing, there was no attempt on the part of the national organization or any of its branches (as far as the writer has been able to ascertain) to assist positively in organizing Negro workers. Fundamentally, the explanation of the antagonism toward union organizations in general and toward the C.I.O. in particular is to be traced to the upper class composition and point of view of the members and especially of the leadership of the Association.

The National Negro Congress⁵⁷

In the first days of the N.R.A. it became apparent that there was no organization in the Negro community capable of or interested in leading the Negro workers of the country in a struggle to obtain the advantages opened to them both as laborers and as members of a minority group. Previous mention has been made of the Joint Committee on Recovery which was organized by John P. Davis. This organization was a pressure group which was hastily brought into existence in 1933 to present material concerning Negro laborers at various code hearings. With the failure of Negroes as a group to obtain protection against the wage differentials in the various codes or successfully to participate in the union organizational campaign of 1933 and 1934, a group of young intellectuals in Washington, D. C., became convinced that a new type of organization addressing itself to the economic problems of Negro industrial and agricultural workers was necessary.

In May, 1935, a conference was sponsored by the Joint Committee on Recovery and members of the Howard University teaching staff to discuss some of the unfair practices which had arisen under the N.R.A. At this economic conference plans were made for holding a National Negro Congress at Chicago. A national sponsoring committee was organized and Davis set out on a tour of the country for the purpose of rallying Negro leaders to the cause of the Congress. The participation of church, civic, political, and labor groups was solicited.

⁵⁷ The author is indebted to Miss Hazel Hayes for much of the material on the National Negro Congress.

The objectives of the proposed Congress were outlined in a pamphlet by Davis, entitled "Let Us Build A National Negro Congress."⁵⁸ Attention was called in this publication to the problems confronting Negro domestics, farmers, and laborers. Injustices under the N.R.A. were described and the invasion of Ethiopia was cited as "another problem of Black America." In this same publication A. Philip Randolph summed up the potentialities of the Congress.

On every fundamental problem, a ringing and militant declaration of policy could be promulgated by such a Congress and since it would represent the collective expression and will of millions of Negroes embraced in their various organizations, government nor industry could view it with indifference and unconcern.

In form the Congress was to be a "federation of forward-thinking organizations in America . . . [to] . . . coordinate the struggle for justice for the Negro."

As more and more groups come to understand the vital need of joint action and the tremendous value of working together, as they come through such united action to a clearer and more friendly understanding of each other, we may expect to see the National Negro Congress become increasingly useful in the struggles of the Negro people in America.⁵⁹

As Randolph stated, the movement was really a "united front against Fascism and repression of the rights of Negroes."

With the announcement of the plans for the Congress, the sponsoring committee was able to obtain the support of a number of leaders in all walks of life. Among those who indorsed the Congress were: Lester Granger and Elmer A. Carter of the National Urban League, Doctor Ralph Bunche, Doctor Alain Locke of Howard University, James W. Ford of the Communist Party, Doctor M. O. Bousfield of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and Bishops James A. Bray, R. A. Carter, and W. J. Walls. There were in addition many professional men, educators and social workers who gave their initial blessing to the movement.

⁵⁸ Washington, D. C., 1935.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

However, after the first enthusiastic response to the stirring call of the sponsoring committee, the broad objectives and the obviously liberal and even "radical" character of some of the supporters of the movement had the effect of making many who had indorsed the Congress timid about any further active participation. In addition, due to the facts that (1) the organizations were unable, and when able, reticent, about putting money into other organizations and (2) the Congress had not outlined a program with the definiteness which would encourage sectarian organizations to contribute money, the sponsoring committee found it difficult to collect sufficient funds to finance the Congress. At this point the Congress assumed a definitely interracial character as several white organizations—trade union and political groups—contributed funds, clerical help, and general aid. The direction of the Congress remained under the influence of a "left wing" group ranging from faint liberals and trade unionists to Communists. These were assisted by a few prominent upper class representatives such as the Reverends Powell and Jernagin, Bishop Bray, Reverend Archibald Carey, Jr., and Doctor Ralph Bunche, who were not frightened by the liberal character of the Congress.

The National Negro Congress officially opened February 14, 1936, at the Eighth Regiment Armory in Chicago. Four general sessions were planned. The first session was not held due to the failure or refusal of Mayor Edward J. Kelly and Mr. Abbott, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, to appear and give official sanction and welcome to the Congress. Adding injury to this apparent insult the "red squad" from the Chicago Police Department threatened to close the Congress almost before it opened on the grounds that it was a "radical organization meeting for the purpose of spreading a subversive doctrine." But for the diplomacy and tact of a small group of Chicagoans, the Congress might have closed ignominiously.

The broad outline of the widely varied interests of the sponsors of the Congress were set out in a paper prepared by A. Philip Randolph:

The issues should be obvious, clear and simple, such as prevention of stoppage of relief, cuts in relief allotments, lay-offs of relief workers, of workers in any industry, discrimination in the giving of relief, exorbitant brutality, denial of free assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of speech to unpopular groups; denial of civil rights to Negroes such as the right to be served in hotels and restaurants, to have access to public utilities, and forms of transportation, such as Pullman cars.

Wage struggles around the war upon Ethiopia by the Fascist dictator, Mussolini, strikes and lock-outs of black and white workers, the amendment to the federal constitution of the adopting of social legislation such as the Retirement Pension Act for railroad workers, fight for the freedom of Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro boys, the Wagner-Costigan anti-lynching bill, the violations of the Wagner Labor Disputes bill, the forcing of teachers to take a loyalty oath, the goose-stepping of students in the school system through the R.O.T.C., the abolition of the color bar in trade unions, the murder of Shoemaker in Tampa, Fla., exposing the menace of the American Liberty League, William Randolph Hearst and the Ku Klux Klan, and supporting the movement of John L. Lewis for industrial unionism.⁶⁰

For meeting these manifold and varied problems six general remedies were suggested: (1) an organized struggle against fascism and war; (2) the building of a powerful Negro civil rights organization; (3) movements to improve the condition of sharecroppers and tenant farmers; (4) mass consumers movements; (5) to intensify and broaden the movement to draw Negro workers into labor organizations; (6) the development of an independent working class political party.

It is interesting to examine the social composition of this group which arrived at such a liberal, and for the Negro community such a radical and inclusive, program. The geographic distribution of the delegates to the Congress indicated that the body was largely drawn from northern urban organizations. There were 817 delegates, representing 585 organizations, from 28 different states. Seven hundred and forty-three of the del-

⁶⁰The keynote address of President A. Philip Randolph. The official proceedings of the National Negro Congress, Washington, D. C. .

legates came from Illinois, Indiana, New York, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Only 55 of the 817 delegates came from the South. Eighty-one per cent of all delegates, then, came from northern urban centers and 353 delegates or 43 per cent of the total came from Chicago alone. Thus the Congress tended to represent the northern urban as opposed to both the southern urban and the rural population.

There were many different interest groups represented at the Congress. Four hundred and forty-one or 75 per cent of the registered delegates were from civic, educational, and religious groups; 15 per cent of the delegates represented organizations which had definite economic programs such as labor unions which comprised the majority of organizations in this category; the other delegates came from other groups such as farm organizations—two delegates; professional groups—six delegates; and business organizations—two delegates. Although the delegates representing the civic, educational, and religious groups were in the great majority, they did not control the deliberations of the Congress. In most cases neither the delegates nor the organizations they represented held sharply defined social and economic views, while the organizations representing the economic pressure groups, especially the trade unions, had a well defined philosophy and were able to cope with the program which had been arranged by the sponsoring committee. The larger majority of the civic, educational, and religious groups representatives were swept along by the enthusiasm of the economic pressure group representatives to approve the well defined program of the Planning Committee. The Congress, then, represented the northern urban Negro population rather than the entire country and attempted to express the interests of the urban industrial Negro workers.

It was obvious that a group with such diverse interests could not long be held together on a program which included aid to Ethiopia, a campaign for civil rights, the development of Negro business, and the encouragement of the organization of Negro workers into trade unions. The first group to break away were the preachers. They had been antagonized by the fact that the

representatives of the civic, educational, and religious groups had had no place of importance on the program. The principal speakers at the large meeting had been such persons as A. Philip Randolph (represented by Charles Wealey Burton) of the Brotherhood of Pullman Porters; Edward Strong, vice-president of the American Youth Congress; James W. Ford of the Communist Party; and Max Yergan of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association. At none of the general sessions did the civic, educational, and religious groups have a principal speaker with the exception of Rev. Archibald J. Carey, Jr., who was called upon at the last minute to fill the gap created by the absence of Mayor Kelly and Robert S. Abbott. This "oversight" so irked some of the clergy that they wrote scathing denunciations of the Congress to the press. In the February 21, 1936, issue of the *Chicago Defender*, three bishops—W. J. Walls, J. A. Bray and R. A. Carter stated:

We might pass over the fact that the church leaders were not consulted in the original set up of such a movement but cannot overlook the truth that with the exception of serving in sectional programs and making invocations and pronouncing benedictions the church leaders, clergy and lay, are entirely ignored in the program of the National Negro Congress. This prevents the church which has the largest following of any organized group among us from having any real part in shaping opinions that may emanate from the Congress through the spread of delegate influence and personal propaganda.

Some of the more conservative leaders in the group came forward to criticize the Congress for its alleged "left wing" tendencies. Even before the Congress met, Dr. Kelly Miller, a newspaper columnist and former professor at Howard University, stated:

The Conference must steer clear of Communism or of any brand of radicalism out of harmony with the spirit and genius of American institutions.⁶¹

In the issue following the meeting of the Congress, Miller stated:

⁶¹ *Chicago Bee*, February 13, 1936.

The National Negro Congress recently held in the city of Chicago was primarily and fundamentally a leftward movement. The original suggestion for such a Congress was made by James W. Ford, Vice-Presidential candidate on the Communist ticket, at a session of the Co-ordinating Committee held at Howard University last May. The suggestion was ardently espoused and seconded by A. Philip Randolph, sometime editor of the *Messenger*, a radical Negro magazine, which heads toward Moscow.

* * * * *

The spirit of radicalism predominated throughout the proceedings. The reds, the Socialists and Communists, were everywhere in ascendancy, either in number or indomitable purpose, or in both. The conservative delegates who constituted a considerable proportion of the conference, were either outnumbered or out-maneuvered.

In spite of these vitriolic criticisms the Congress proceeded to set up the permanent national organization which had been outlined by the group then in session. A. Philip Randolph had been elected chairman of the national organization, John P. Davis, secretary and Marion Cuthbert, treasurer. A national office was established in Washington, D. C., and the country was divided into fifteen districts. The functions of the districts were to obtain affiliations of both organizations and individual members to the Congress, to raise funds, and to carry out the program adopted at the convention. Units were immediately formed in such industrial centers as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Gary, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.

The enthusiasm aroused at the Congress was carried over into the first few months following the close of the Conference. However, both the local units and the national organization became the target for a great deal of criticism from the more conservative leaders of the community and as the Congress did not have any firm support from the masses of the Negroes it soon felt the weight of this attack. In addition, the local units were hampered by their lack of funds. With the antagonism of most of the community leaders, especially the church and the press, the apathy of the mass of Negroes, and the shortage of funds, neither the local units nor the national organization was able to

carry out effectively the program which had been formulated at the Congress. The local units dwindled in number and importance and only three or four councils were able to maintain their existence, except on paper.

With the rise of the C.I.O. the Chicago chapter, at least, took on more life. A close relationship was established between this unit of the Congress and the C.I.O. and several of the paid Negro organizers were recommended to the C.I.O. by the Congress. Among these were L. McDonald, Henry Johnson, and Eleanor Rye of the S.W.O.C. A portion of these organizers' salaries was at first paid by the National Negro Congress. The Congress in Chicago and some of the other industrial centers was also active in urging unionization of Negro workers and held mass meetings and distributed leaflets and press releases to this end. However, of all the councils originally set up, only those in New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh were able actually to survive and function during the interim between the first and second Congress. The Chicago council enjoyed intermittent spurts of life but consistently failed to rally large numbers of Negroes to its support. It was evident that the first National Negro Congress failed to meet the immediate issues of the Negro group in any fashion which would have effected a national "united front of all the elements in the Negro community in one concrete program."

The second Negro Congress was called to meet in Philadelphia on October 15, 1937. The objectives of the Congress were much less inclusive than had been those of the first. They included demands for decent jobs for Negroes and the right to join unions; adequate relief and security for needy families; support of the anti-lynch bill; and complete economic, cultural, political, and social equality for Negro people. This session of the Congress was much more successful in obtaining the cooperation of many organizations and individuals who had not participated in the first conference. Such important persons as Walter White, secretary of the National Association of Colored People; Vito Marcontonio, former Congressman from New York; Doctor Charles Wealey of Howard University; Pres-

ident F. D. Patterson of Tuskegee Institute; Lieutenant Governor Thomas J. Kennedy of Pennsylvania, and the secretary-treasurer of the United Mine Workers of America; Doctor Harry F. Ward, chairman of the League Against War and Fascism; Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party; and I. Davis Wilson, Mayor of Philadelphia, appeared on the program. The Congress received greetings from President Roosevelt and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

The second Congress followed much the pattern of the first. The 1218 delegates from various parts of the country adopted one hundred and seventy-four resolutions covering the same variety of subjects. An executive committee was elected with A. Philip Randolph as president, John P. Davis as executive secretary, Gladys Stone as financial secretary, U. Simpeon Tate, treasurer, Max Yergan, director of the International Committee on African Affairs, and Rev. William Jernagin of Washington, D. C., as vice-president. The Congress went on record as specifically opposed to the appointment of Justice Hugo L. Black to the Supreme Court; it urged a million dollar federal housing fund; opposed trade union dualism and endorsed the Committee on Industrial Organization. Plans were made to hold the 1938 Congress in Detroit.

Many criticisms could be made of the program and character of the National Negro Congress. It is open to serious question that a "united front" of the various diverse and antagonistic elements in the Negro community can arrive at a common program of action. Certainly a more or less "left wing" program such as outlined by the Congress which recommended a militant trade union, civil rights, and anti-fascist policy would not suit the tastes of the conservative ministry and professional men. Similarly, it is hard to envisage a program which would simultaneously further the conflicting interests of the Negro trade unionist and business man. And, although the Congress adopted many resolutions concerning the evils which confront the Negro, they were not in a position to offer a very concrete program for their abolition. As one writer stated: "They told the Negro what to do but not how to do it. No adequate means or feasible

agencies were established to implement and make effective the high-sounding resolutions and pretensions."

In relation to the central problem of this discussion, *i.e.*, how Negroes may best be introduced into trade union organizations, the Congress was effective in focusing the attention of the Negro community on many fundamental social, economic, and political factors which impinge upon the problem but it did not set up a concrete program and machinery for the accomplishment of this end. Certainly the National Negro Congress was not an organization which was dedicated solely to the all-important end of organizing Negroes into unions. The National Negro Congress can be thought of only as a very progressive and broad equal rights organization and not unlike several other attempts at racial solidarity. A movement dedicated to the single purpose of integrating Negroes into the trade union movement has yet to be formed.