

"RACE WORKERS LOST CHAMPION WHEN LEWIS FELL" -- CAYTON

Author of "Black Workers In New Unions," Expert On Labor, Describes Negro Labor's New Position In Crisis—Says Point of View of Whites Not Always Identical With That of Blacks.

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CHICAGO, Dec. 12—The tragedy of American racial prejudice in the field of organized labor will become increasingly evident as the crisis which labor is now facing is drawn into sharper focus. Just as truly as the French workers saw the social gains which they had achieved through Leon Blum, melt away under the im-



impact of the war and the reactionary government of Daladier, so to an extent are the American workers facing the possibility of a victory of the super-patriotic National Manufacturers association who would outlaw strikes and preserve the status quo in bargaining relations, thus blocking any further drive to organize the unorganized.

In this situation it is regrettable that Negro workers cannot always join with other workers to support those organizations and programs that would offer aggressive militant leadership for the preservation of the rights of labor which have already been gained, the extension of the benefits of collective bargaining to the unskilled masses, while at the same time cooperating with the government in a program of national defense.

But black workers have found through years of bitter experience, that they are black as well as workers. While sharing in the general problems of all labor, they have a peculiar set of difficulties arising out of their racial identity, which, as James Weldon Johnson has said, "... makes it necessary for the Negro to look at the world through the prism of being a black man.

In the two problems which face the labor movement today ... the struggle for leadership and a program within the CIO and the question of labor unity between the CIO and the A. F. of L. — the Negro must act always in terms of

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what will be best for him as a Negro, and then what will be best for the labor movement and the country. The Negro worker, like the Negro citizen, cannot assume the role of a "illy white angel," making self-sacrifices for a principle which allows him nothing but unemployment and starvation. A review of the kaleidoscopic shift of events which have changed the entire complexion of the labor movement within the past two months will illustrate the fact that all labor is facing a crisis and show the special difficulties of the Negro worker in attempting to orient himself in this confused world.

LEWIS BREACH PAVES WAY FOR HILLMAN

It all happened sometime ago, according to the people in the "know," when William Green and John L. Lewis were called in by the President and shown the "M-Day Plans" (mobilization day) for labor. It is rumored that Greene agreed to go along with the administration, while Lewis objected strenuously.

This disagreement with the President furthered the split which had already developed between them and paved the way for the appointment of Sidney Hillman, a gentleman of much more amenable character, as labor chief of the National Defense Advisory Commission.

"PINCHER MOVEMENT" CATCHES LEWIS

With the skillful maneuvering of the Administration and the enormous prestige of the President on one side and on the other the ideological and personal differences which Lewis had with some of the leaders of CIO unions, Lewis found himself at the time of the convention the victim of a "pincher movement," which had isolated him and his extreme left wing followers from the bulk of the CIO members in spite of his great personal popularity.

Since then, Lewis has drifted further to the "left" (or "right" according to your own political orientation) and recently P. M., New York's new and energetic daily, released the fact that Daughter Kathryn, John L.'s trusted adviser and confidante had joined such Hitler appeasers as Henry Ford, Robert E. Woods, Hugh Johnson, Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Eddie Rickenbacher. One could predict that there will be a continued movement to the "right" of what remains of the once militant CIO until the "shot gun wedding" between it and the bureaucratic A. F. of L. is affected.

LIBERALS WASTE FEW TEARS ON JOHN L.

Most liberals throughout the country, have wasted few tears on John L. Lewis and feel that his argument with the President was personal and vindictive and that he is what he characterized Garner as being "A mean whiskey drinking old man."

We, however, cannot dismiss Lewis in such terms either from the point of view of one interested in the welfare of the general labor movement or as one interested in that special segment of labor which is black.

The fact that Lewis was the dynamic driving force behind the whole CIO movement to organize the unorganized workers in the mass production industries need not be labored.

ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS NEGRO CHAMPION

Of more special interest is his attitude toward Negro workers. As president of the United Mine Workers' union, Lewis has had, for years, more Negro members than any other labor group in the country, and is willing to cope with the problems incident to the integration of Negroes into labor organization.

During the five years which the CIO has been in existence, Lewis definitely has established himself as the champion of not only the Negro's rights to join labor unions, but has waged an aggressive fight for political freedom for the Negro in the South.

Whatever Lewis' faults may be, whatever bad judgment he may have had on other questions; however erratic his behavior may have appeared to politicians, he has done more than any living man to advance the cause of the Negro in labor.

MURRAY WILL BE FAIR, BUT WILL LACK ZEAL

What course Philip Murray, the new CIO chief, will take and to what extent Lewis will continue to exercise influence on the program of the organization will be determined by time. But in this

instance the shifting of leadership of the CIO has robbed the Negro worker of his one great champion. Murray may attempt to "play fair" with Negroes but he can never be the aggressive crusading champion of the black worker that Lewis was. What is best for the general labor movement, at this particular period, we are not in a position to say, but viewing the situation through the prism of color one can only arrive at the conclusion that the first step toward labor unity has resulted in a loss for the Negro.