

# A NOTE ON THE NEGRO AND THE NEW DEAL

By John P. Davis

Executive Secretary, Joint Committee On National Recovery.

It is highly important for the Negro citizen of America to take inventory of the gains and losses which have come to him under the "New Deal." The Roosevelt Administration has now had two years in which to unfold itself. Its portents are reasonably clear to anyone who seriously studies the varied activities of its recovery program. We can now state with reasonable certainty what the "New Deal" means for the Negro.

At once the most striking and irrefutable indication of the effect of the "New Deal" on the Negro can be gleaned from relief figures furnished by the government itself. In October 1933, six months after the present administration took office, 2,117,000 Negroes were in families receiving relief in the United States. These represented 17.8 percent of the total Negro population as of the 1930 Census. In January 1935, after nearly two years of Recovery measures, 3,500,000 Negroes were in families receiving relief, or 29 percent of our 1930 population. Certainly only a slight portion of the large increase in the number of impoverished Negro families can be explained away by the charitable, on the grounds that relief administration has become more humane. As a matter of fact federal relief officials, themselves, admit that grave abuses exist in the administration of rural relief to Negroes. And this is reliably borne out by the disproportionate increase in the number of urban Negro families on relief to the number of rural Negro families on relief. Thus the increase in the number of Negroes in relief families is an accurate indication of the deepening of the economic crisis for black America.

## NRA Lowers Negro Standard of Living

The promise of NRA to bring higher wages and increased employment to industrial workers has glimmered away. In the code-making process occupational and geographical differentials at first were used as devices to exclude from the operation of minimum wages and maximum hours the bulk of the Negro workers. Later, clauses basing code wage rates on the previously existing wage differential between Negro and white workers tended to continue the inferior status of the Negro. For the particular firms for whom none of these devices served as an effective means of keeping down Negro wages, there is an easy way out through the securing of an exemption specifically relating to the Negro worker in the plant. Such exemptions are becoming more numerous as time goes on. Thus from the beginning relatively few Negro workers were even theoretically covered by NRA labor provisions.

But employers did not have to rely on the code-making process. The Negro worker not already discriminated against through code provisions had many other gaulelets to run. The question of importance to him as to all workers was, "As a result of all of NRA's maneuvers will I be able to buy more?" The answer has been "No." A worker cannot eat a wage rate. To determine what this wage rate is a number of other factors. Thus rates for longshoremen seem relatively high. But when we realize that the average amount of work a longshoreman receives during the year is from ten to fifteen weeks, the wage rate loses much of its significance. When we add to that fact the increase in the cost of living—as high as 40 per

cent in many cases—the wage rate becomes even more chimerical. For other groups of industrial workers increases in cost of living, coupled with the part time and irregular nature of the work, make the results of NRA negligible. In highly mechanized industries speed-up and stretch-out nullify the promised result of NRA to bring increased employment through shorter hours. For the workers are now producing more in their shorter work periods than in the longer periods before NRA. There is less employment. The first sufferer from fewer jobs is the Negro worker. Finally the complete break-down of compliance machinery in the South has cancelled the last minute advantage to Negro workers which NRA's enthusiasts may have claimed.

**Farmers Exploited Under AAA**

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has used cruder methods in enforcing poverty on the Negro farm population. It has made violations of the rights of tenants under crop reduction contracts easy; it has rendered the enforcement of these rights impossible. The reduction of acreage under cultivation through the government rental agreement made unnecessary, large numbers of tenants and farm laborers. Although the contract with the government provided that the landowner should not reduce the number of his tenants he did so. The federal courts have now refused to allow tenants to enjoin such evictions. Faced with this Dred Scott decision against farm tenants, the AAA has remained discreetly silent. Farm laborers are now jobless by the hundreds of thousands, the conservative government estimate of the decline in agricultural employment for the year 1934 alone being a quarter of a million. The larger portion of these are unskilled Negro agricultural workers—now without income and unable to secure work or relief.

But the unemployment and tenant evictions occasioned by the crop reduction policies of the AAA is not all. For the tenants and sharecroppers who were retained on the plantations, the government's agricultural program meant reduced income. Wholesale fraud on tenants in the payment of parity checks occurred. Tenants complaining to the Department of Agriculture have their letters referred back to the locality in which they live and trouble of serious nature often results. Even when this does not happen, the tenant fails to get his check. The remainder of the land he tills on shares with his landlord brings him only the most meagre necessities during the crop season, varying from three to five months. The rest of the period for him and his family is one of "root hog or die."

The past year has seen an extension of poverty even to the small percentage (a little more than 20 percent) of Negro farmers who own their own land. For them compulsory reduction of acreage for cotton and tobacco crops, with the quantum of such reduction controlled and regulated by local boards on which they have no representation, has meant drastic reduction of their already low income. Wholesale confiscation of the income of the Negro cotton and tobacco farmer is being made by prejudiced local boards in the South under the very nose of the federal government. In the wake of such confiscation has come a tremendous increase in land tenancy as a result of foreclosures on Negro-owned properties.

**PWA Squeezed Through With Prejudice**

Nor has the vast public works program, designed to give increased employment to workers in the construction trades, been free from prejudice. State officials in the South are in many cases in open rebellion against the ruling of PWA that the same wage scales must be paid to Negro and white labor. Compliance with this paper ruling is enforced in only rare cases. The majority of the instances of violation of this rule are unremedied. Only unskilled work is given Negroes on public works projects in most instances. And even here discrimination in employment is notorious. Such is bound to be the case when we realize that there are only a handful of investigators available to seek enforcement.

Recently a move has been made by Negro officials in the Administration to effect larger employment of Negro skilled and unskilled workers on public works projects by specifying that failure of a contractor to pay a certain percentage of his payroll to Negro artisans will be evidence of racial discrimination. Without doubting the good intentions of the sponsors of this ingenious scheme, it must nevertheless be pointed out that it fails to meet the problem in a number of vital particulars. It has yet to face a test in the courts, even if one is willing to suppose that high officials of PWA will bring it to a test. Percentages thus far experimented with are far too low and the number of such experiments far too few to make an effective dent in the unemployment conditions of Negro construction industry workers. Moreover the scheme gives aid and comfort to employer-advocates of strike-breaking and the open shop; and, while offering, perhaps, some temporary relief to a few hundred workers, it establishes a dan-

gerous precedent which throws back the labor movement and the organization of Negro workers to a considerable degree. The scheme, whatever its Negro sponsors may hope to the contrary, becomes therefore only another excuse for their white superiors maintaining a "do-nothing" policy with regard to discrimination against Negroes in the Public Works Administration.

## Long Term New Deal Policies Condemn Negroes To Ghettos

The Negro has no pleasanter outlook in the long term social planning ventures of the new administration. Planning for subsistence homesteads for industrially stranded workers has been muddled enough even without consideration of the problems of integrating Negroes into such plans. Subsistence homesteads projects are over burdened with profiteering prices for the homesteads and foredoomed to failure by the lack of planning for adequate and permanent incomes for prospective homesteaders.

In callous disregard of the interdiction in the Constitution of the United States against the use of federal funds for projects which discriminate against applicants solely on the ground of color, subsistence homesteads have been planned on a strictly "ily-white" basis. The more than 200 applicants for the first project at Arthurdale, West Virginia were not even considered, Mr. Bushrod Grimes (then in charge of the project) announcing that the project was to be open only to "native white stock." As far North as Dayton, Ohio, where state laws prohibit any type of segregation against Negroes, the federal government has extended its "ily-white" policy. Recently it has established two Jim-Crow projects for Negroes. Thus the new administration seeks in its program of social planning to perpetuate ghettos of Negroes for fifty years to come.

An even more blatant example of this policy of "ily-white" reconstruction is apparent in the planning of the model town of Norris, Tennessee, by the Tennessee Valley Authority. This town of 450 model homes is intended for the permanent workers on Norris Dam. The homes are rented by the federal government, which at all times maintains title to the land and dwellings and has complete control of the town management. Yet officials at TVA openly admit that no Negroes are allowed at Norris.

TVA has other objectionable features. While Negro employment now approaches an equitable proportion of total employment; the payroll of Negro workers remains disproportionately lower than that of whites. While the government has maintained a trade school to train workers on the project, no Negro trainees have been admitted. Nor have any meaningful plans matured for the future of the several thousand Negro workers who in another year or so will be left without employment, following completion of work on the dam being built by TVA.

No one at TVA headquarters at Knoxville seems to have the remotest idea of how Negroes in the Tennessee Valley will be able to buy the cheap electricity which TVA is designed to produce. The officials frankly admit that standards of living of the Negro population are low that the introduction of industry into the Valley is at present only a nebulous dream, that even if this eventuates there is no assurance that Negro employment will result. The fairest summary that can be made of TVA is that for a year or so it has furnished bread to a few thousand Negro workers. Beyond that everything is conjecture; conjecture which is most unpleasant because of the utter planlessness of those in charge of the project.

Recovery legislation of the present session of Congress reveals the same fatal flaws which have been noted in the operation of previous recovery ventures. Thus, for example, instead of genuine unemployment insurance we have an administration plan proposing to exclude from any insurance domestic and agricultural workers, in which classes are to be found 15 out of every 23 Negro workers. On every hand the administration has used "New Deal" slogans for the same raw deal.

## Negro Masses Reacting to the Crisis

The sharpening of the crisis for Negroes has not found them unresponsive. Two years of increasing hardship has seen strange movement among the masses. In Chicago, New York, Washington and Baltimore the struggle for jobs has given rise to action on the part of a number of groups seeking to boycott white employers who refuse to employ Negroes. "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns are springing up everywhere. The crisis has furnished renewed vigor to the Garvey movement. And proposals for a 49th state are being seriously considered by various groups.

In sharp contrast with these strictly racial approaches to the problem have been a number of interracial approaches. Increasing numbers of unemployed groups have been organized under radical leadership and have picketed relief stations for bread. Sharecroppers Unions, under Communist leadership in Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina and under Socialist leadership in Arkansas, have shaken America into a consciousness of the growing resentment of Southern farm tenants and the joint determination of the Negro and white tenants to do something about their intolerable con-

dition. In every major strike in this country Negro union members have fought with their white fellow workers in a struggle for economic survival. The bodies of ten Negro strikers killed in such a strike struggles offer mute testimony to this fact. Even the vicious policies of the leaders of the A. F. of L. in discrimination against Negro workers is breaking down under the pressure for solidarity from the ranks of the whites.

## Nation-wide Conference Scheduled For May

This heightening of spirit among all elements of black America and the seriousness of the crisis for them make doubly necessary the consideration of the social and economic condition of the Negro at this time. It was a realization of these conditions which gave rise to the proposal to hold a national conference on the economic status of Negroes under the New Deal at Howard University May 18, 19 and 20.

At this conference, sponsored by the Social Science Division of Howard University and the Joint Committee on National Recovery, a candid and intelligent survey of the social and economic position of the Negro will be made. Unlike most conferences, it will not be a talk-fest. For months nationally known economists and other technicians have been working on papers to be presented. Unlike other conferences it will not be a one-sided affair. Ample opportunity will be afforded for high government officials to present their views of the "New Deal." Others not connected with the government, including representatives of radical political parties, will also appear to present their conclusions. Not the least important phase will be the appearance on the platform of Negro workers and farmers themselves to offer their own experiences under the "New Deal." Out of such conference can and will come a clear cut analysis of the problems faced by the Negro and the nation.

But a word of caution ought to be expressed with regard to this significant conference. In the final analysis it cannot and does not claim to be representative of the mass opinion of Negro citizens in America. All it can claim for itself is that it will bring together on a nonrepresentative basis well informed Negro and white technicians to discuss the momentous problem it has chosen as its topic. It can furnish a base for action for any organization which chooses to avail itself of the information developed by it. It cannot act itself.

## "National Negro Congress" Suggested

Thus looking beyond such a conference one cannot fail to hope that it will furnish impetus to a national expression of black America demanding a tolerable solution to the economic evils which it suffers. Perhaps, it is not too much to hope that public opinion may be moulded by this conference to such an extent that already existing church, civic, fraternal, professional and trade union organizations will see the necessity for concerted effort in forging a mighty arm of protest against injustice suffered by the Negro. It is not necessary that such organizations agree on every issue. On the problem of relief of the Negro in America from intolerable poverty there is little room for disagreement. The important thing is that throughout America as never before Negroes awake to the need for a unity of action on vital economic problems which perplex us.

Such a hope is not lacking in foundation upon solid ground. Such an instance as the "All India Congress" of British India furnishes an example (and there are many) of what repressed groups can do to better their social and economic status. Perhaps, a "National Negro Congress" of delegates from thousands of Negro organizations (and white organizations willing to recognize their unity of interest) will furnish a vehicle for channeling public opinion of black America.

One thing is certain: the Negro may stand still but the depression will not. And unless there is concerted action of Negroes throughout the nation, the next two years will bring even greater misery to the millions of underprivileged Negro toilers in this country.

## Separate Negro State Held Race Problem Solution

New York, May 2.—Whether or not the American Negro's salvation lies in a separate Negro state in this country is the subject of a spirited three-cornered debate in the May issue of THE CRISIS, official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, out this week. Arrayed on the side of racial separation are Attorney Oscar C. Brown, founder of the 49th State Movement, and James S. Allen, Communist writer. In his characteristic manner George S. Schuyler, well-known author and columnist, ridicules the idea, declaring it to be nonsensical, unfeasible and unconstitutional. Attorney Brown is not specific as to the possible location of the 49th State but Mr. Allen suggests that section of the South known as the Black Belt where Negroes predominate in the population. Each statement is stimulating and revealing, and the debate will provoke wide discussion.

Another well-written timely, and closely reasoned article is

"Ethiopia and World Politics" by George Padmore, erstwhile editor of the Third International organ "The Black Worker" who was ousted by Soviet Russia because he protested against the failure of the Communists to rally to the aid of the African workers. In the same issue Daisy E. Lampkin, regional field secretary of the N. A. A. C. P. tells of successful organization work in the South. John P. Davis lashes the impoverishment of Negro workers under the New Deal and there is an important statement on the much-discussed George Crawford case, accompanied by hitherto unpublished documents.

## L. L. D. Moves to Free Youngest Scottsboro Boys

**Demands Hearing in Juvenile Court for Roy Wright and Eugene Williams**

## FOR RELEASE OF ALL BOYS

New York—CNA—Immediate hearings in the juvenile court for Eugene Williams and Roy Wright, the two youngest Scottsboro boys, will be sought by Attorney Osmond K. Fraenkel, white, the International Labor Defense announced this week.

Further legal steps in the cases of Haywood Patterson and Clarence Norris are waiting on the mandate to be handed down by the U. S. Supreme Court. On April 1, that court reversed the death sentences of Patterson and Norris.

## Hearing to be Set

B. L. Malone, white justice of the DeCATUR juvenile court, was interviewed last week by C. B. Powell, white, Birmingham, Alabama, lawyer associated with the Scottsboro defense of the L. L. D. Malone agreed to set a date for the hearings and informed Mr. Powell that he had notified Attorney-General A. Carmichael to that effect.

On June 1, 1933, Judge James J. Horton was forced to separate the cases of Roy Wright and Eugene Williams from the others because of their ages when Attorney Fraenkel made application for a writ of habeas corpus on the grounds they were being illegally held without trial. At the time, they were both 13 years old.

## Two Issues Involved

The judge of a juvenile court, according to the laws of the state of Alabama, must pass on two issues. They are, first, whether a defendant is innocent or guilty, and secondly, if guilty, whether he can be reformed. If the judge finds a defendant incorrigible, the case is sent back to the ordinary criminal court for trial.

Witnesses who testified in the previous trials of Haywood Patterson and Clarence Norris at Decatur, Alabama, will be used in the hearings before Judge Malone to prove the innocence of Eugene Williams and Roy Wright. Anna Damon, acting national secretary of the L. L. D. urged all friends and sympathizers of the Scottsboro boys to redouble their protest activities, raising the demand for no reindictments and the immediate, unconditional release of the Scottsboro boys. Miss Damon requested that all funds for Scottsboro defense be rushed to the national office of the L. L. D., at 80 E. 11th Street, New York City.

## Davis Scores NRA and FERA Jim Crowism

Washington, May 2.—Appearing as a representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People before the Senate Finance Committee on April 16, Attorney John P. Davis of this city scored the administration of federal relief and NRA code differentials which have sunk the Negro farther into poverty and degradation.

He declared that 12 per cent more Negroes are now on relief than in October 1933, when the NRA began. At that time 17.8 per cent of the Negroes were on relief. The figure now is in excess of 29 per cent he said.

Protesting against wage differentials in codes, Davis mentioned the case of the fertilizer industry in Delaware which employs largely Negro workers. In order to pay them less, Delaware is listed as a southern state, though for other industries it is considered in the north and workers are paid accordingly. Replying to a question by Senator King, Davis pointed out that where Negro workers organize, their wages are higher. Intimidation keeps most of them from joining unions in the south, however, he said.

Referring to delays and discriminations in cases affecting Negroes, Davis related that after 15 months of pressure to remedy a code wage violation in the case of 134 Negro women formerly employed by the Maid Well Garment Co. of Forrest City, Ark., the case is still pending. He pointed out that absence of Negroes on NRA boards makes it easy to discriminate against them

in labor disputes. Davis called for outlawing of company unions; labor representation on compliance boards; a national minimum wage based on annual labor income; abolition of occupational, geographical and other wage differentials; and outlawing of any differentials based on race.

## Tobias Joins Staff of Race Relations Group

**Y. M. C. A. Senior Secretary Will Divide Time With Commission on Inter-racial cooperation.**

Atlanta, Ga., May 2.—For the ensuing year, in addition to his work as Senior Secretary of the National Council of the Y. M. C. A., Dr. Channing H. Tobias will devote part of his time to the work of the Commission on Inter-racial cooperation, according to an announcement from the headquarters of the latter organization in this city. The Y. M. C. A. agreed to share Dr. Tobias' time at the earnest request of the Inter-racial Commission, which felt that he could render the cause of race relations a unique and invaluable service in connection with certain projects which the commission is promoting.

The veteran Y. M. C. A. leader was encouraged to accept the added responsibility by recent opportunities to address important Southern groups as an interpreter of inter-racial good-will, and by the uniform courtesy and appreciation with which his services in that connection were received. In a recent good will tour in Texas he spoke by invitation before the State Teachers Association and in seven of the leading white colleges, and everywhere was given a most cordial and sympathetic hearing. His appearance last summer as one of the principal speakers at the Southern Methodist Summer Conference at Lake Junaluska, N. C., is another case in point.

It should be clearly understood that Dr. Tobias' connection with the Y. M. C. A. as Senior Secretary for Colored Work continues unchanged. The new arrangement with the Inter-racial Commission means only that he will divide time between the two organizations. The Commission counts itself fortunate in effecting this arrangement.

## Biographical

Dr. Tobias is a native of Augusta, Ga., and is a graduate of Paine college and of Drew Theological Seminary. He is a trustee of Paine college, Howard University, and Palmer Memorial Institute. He taught six years at Paine college and for twenty-four years has been connected with the International Committee of the Y. M. C. A. for the last eleven years as senior secretary. Dr. Tobias has twice been to Europe, first as a delegate to the Pan-African Congress and later as a delegate to the Y. M. C. A. world conference at Helsingford. In 1928 he received the Harmon Award for distinguished service in the field of religion.

## Orators to Clash in Contest on May 13.

New York, May 2.—Champion orators selected from contests staged by the Staten Island, New York, Jamaica and New Rochelle, N. A. A. C. P. branches will participate in the Metropolitan district oratorical contest held by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at Curtis high school, Staten Island on Friday evening, May 3. Participating branches are holding preliminary contests as follows: New York at Grace church on April 28; Jamaica at Allen A. M. E. church, 160th St. near South Road, on April 26; and New Rochelle at Wingah Avenue Methodist church on April 24. Staten

Island holds its contest, March 29 and Miss Edna Morgan won it. Subjects must deal with the history, achievements, problems and activities of the Negro race.

The Lehman cup, given by Governor Herbert H. Lehman, a director of the N. A. A. C. P., will go to the winning branch. Any branch receiving the cup twice in succession or three times, will keep it. Individual prizes of gold, silver and bronze medals will be awarded those winning first, second and third places.

## Evade Michigan Law to Fix Death Penalty

Detroit, Mich.—CNA—Federal authorities here are determined to execute James O. Kirk although Michigan law prohibits the death penalty.

Kirk, a laborer of Battle Creek, Mich., in charged with "criminal assault" within a United States military reservation. Federal officials are attempting to remove him from the jurisdiction of the state in order to secure a death sentence.

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