

COMMUNISTS

JAMES W. FORD

IN THE

BENJAMIN J. DAVIS, Jr.

STRUGGLE

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EARL BROWDER

NEGRO RIGHTS

NOTE

The articles in this pamphlet by James W. Ford, Benjamin J. Davis, Jr. and William L. Patterson are based on the authors' contributions to a Round-Table Symposium on the question: "Have the Communists Quit the Fight for Negro Rights," recently organized under the auspices of the Negro Digest. Also participating in the symposium were George S. Schuyler and Horace Cayton, who took the affirmative side.

FOREWORD

THE economic, social and political advances of the Negro people during the last twenty-five years have been of great historical significance. It is an undeniable fact, well known to the Negro people, that the Communists have played a major role in helping to bring about these great changes. It was in partial recognition of this that the *Negro Digest*, a nationally prominent magazine, asked three Negro Communists to participate in a symposium in its columns on the topic, "Have the Communists Quit Fighting for Negro Rights?" This pamphlet contains these three articles, as well as a contribution by Earl Browder, "On the Negroes and the Right of Self-Determination."

The war has raised the question of Negro rights in the most acute form. It should be evident that the struggle for these rights could not and cannot be separated from the war. The Negro people know what they are struggling for. The question is: what is the relation of this struggle to the war. The Negro people have given their answer and there is little doubt of its correctness. In taking their stand, they have had to choose among alternative courses pressed upon them by different spokesmen.

One of these trends of thought was that the war should be supported conditionally and Negro rights should be bargained against support for the war. The Communists took the position that winning Negro rights and winning the war were mutually interlinked. This policy did not mean giving up the fight for Negro rights. On the contrary, this was the only course that would guarantee that the rights for the Negro people would be gained and a firm basis laid for extending them. It can be said that the Negro people generally accepted and followed this course. The other policy would have played into the hands of the enemies of the nation and the Negro

people, would have postponed the securing of gains and might even have contributed to wiping out the struggle against national oppression which the Negro people, together with their allies, have brought to such a high point in recent years.

Admittedly, there are many grievances of the Negro people. The most glaring is segregation in the armed forces and these grievances must be completely wiped out if democracy is to survive. Some fundamental steps were taken by the Government to end discrimination and integrate the Negro people into the American nation under our present system. But the policy of "conditional support" would have hampered and obstructed even these measures. Indeed, this policy could only have led to stirring racial strife and separating the Negro people from their best allies, thereby hampering the war. By rejecting this policy, as they did, the Negro people have made an important contribution to the unity of the nation and to their own struggle for equal rights. The basic policy of the Communist movement over the last twenty-five years, which aided in clarifying the Negro question as a question of democracy, and won wide support among labor and other progressive sections of the population, has done more to mobilize wide support for Negro rights than the policies of any other single group in American life.

The war has still to be won. But already there is considerable discussion on the post-war world and the place of the Negro people in the peace. This question is clearly of the utmost importance.

Among the most pressing problems of the Negro people will be to safeguard the gains they have already made, to fight for establishment of a permanent F.E.P.C. which President Roosevelt projected in his broadcast on October 25, and to secure job rights.

Job security, which is connected with the seniority question in the trade unions, will be problem number one. The acuteness of this problem arises from the possibility of large numbers becoming unemployed during reconversion and after the

war, and that as a consequence Negroes will be the first to be fired. The solution to this problem is that everybody must have jobs. This is a question just as much for the white workers as for the Negro workers. The trade unions will have to work out this problem in such a manner as to insure that the Negroes will be maintained in employment in approximately the proportion they have already reached, and assure them new jobs in any program of expanded production.

The seniority rule must not perpetuate discrimination nor must it be broken down. On the contrary, these rules must be supported and built up as generally accepted principles beneficial to both Negro and white workers. A post-war outlook of worldwide economic expansion based upon unity and friendly collaboration of the United Nations will make the solution of this problem less difficult.

Another problem is how to strengthen and extend the democratic advances made by the Negro people through a legislative program to abolish the poll tax and all legal discriminatory practices and laws, to secure more and better housing and to achieve better health conditions and recreation.

The solution of these problems must proceed simultaneously with a program of raising the general educational and cultural level of the Negro people and mobilizing the public, and the labor movement in the first place, in support of all demands of the Negro people and their full unification into American life.

The creation of a large Negro proletariat with its roots deep in the trade unions and in the progressive forces is a lasting factor in shaping the destiny of the Negro people, and in reinforcing its decision, made without any pressure from special interests, to take the path of integration into the whole American nation as one united nation.

The Negro people have been a source of democratic strength to the nation in the war. After the war they will play an even greater democratic role on a world scale. In their struggle for equal status in the United States the Negro people will play a

role which will affect not only their own position here but will contribute to the solution of the problems of colored people throughout the world.

The Communists were a small group when they projected the struggle for Negro rights into American economic and political life. Today the Communists are part of a great majority of the labor and progressive forces which have accepted and are themselves advancing the struggle for Negro rights. This is of great historical significance and a decisive guarantee that other gains will be made.

George S. Schuyler and Horace Cayton who took part in the symposium organized by the *Negro Digest* claimed that "the Communists had quit fighting for the rights of the Negro people." Their arguments were mainly of an anti-Communist character, used by the Dewey forces in the presidential election campaign. The people have given their answer by decisively rejecting Dewey's bid for power, and the overwhelming majority of Negro voters joined in this rejection.

But there is something more fundamental to consider, and that is, that although "Red-baiting" was rejected, the election brought out into the clear a seasoned and well-organized reactionary group in our American life. They do not intend to give up. They will continue their fight against the progress of our country. They will continue to try to mobilize among the Negro people those forces gullible or unprincipled enough to use anti-Communism as a means of trying to destroy the unity between the Negro people and their best allies in the ranks of labor and the progressive forces. At the same time they will continue to spread anti-Negro poison.

It is our hope that this pamphlet will contribute to further clarity regarding the conditions of the struggle for Negro rights so that greater headway may be made towards achieving complete equality for the Negro people and their full integration into American life.

J.W.F.

December 15, 1944

COMMUNISTS IN THE FIGHT FOR NEGRO RIGHTS

By JAMES W. FORD

*Vice-President
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“**H**AVE Communists quit fighting for Negro rights?” This is indeed a strange question to ask me and my colleagues, Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., New York City Councilman, and William L. Patterson, Assistant Director of the Lincoln School in Chicago. Despite the perverted form of the question it establishes a fact of great historical significance in the life of the Negro people and the democratic life of the nation—the fact that the Communists have played a particularly outstanding role in the destiny of our people.

It is no accident that attention is focused particularly on the Communists in the struggle for Negro rights. For, in the last twenty-five years, it has been the Communists who have not only been in advance of all sections of the population in this struggle, but for a long time were pretty much alone in it. And the Negro people have acquired a profound appreciation of the struggle of the Communists for Negro rights.

Why have the Communists been consistently fighting for Negro rights? It is because they are opposed to oppression of any people; because they have always understood that labor in the white skin cannot be free, nor can democracy be secure, as long as the Negro people are enthralled; because they know that the disfranchisement of the Negro is one of the pillars of reaction in the country, directed also against labor and against the people and every progressive current. American democracy could not be healthy if it rested upon the oppression of a tenth of the population.

This approach is part of the fundamental conception of the Communist movement and allows of no compromise, and the record of the Communists demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Negro people that at no time have the Communists compromised on this question, so basic for the American labor movement and for the progressive development of the country.

It is not my intention to review this record. I will take only the example which provides the most decisive test of all, namely, the Communist position on the Negro question in our present war of national survival. This is a war against fascism, and every honest and sincere opponent of reaction and oppression in any form understood immediately that only the complete defeat and destruction of fascism in this war could assure continuation of human progress, and that all other considerations would have to be subordinated to this central objective. This is the way the Communists have approached the question and this is the way the Negro people as a whole have approached it. On this both are in full accord.

Those who insinuate that the Communists have given up the struggle for Negro rights really want to say two things: (a) that victory in the war and the fight for Negro rights have nothing to do with one another; (b) that the Communists place victory in the war above the defense of Negro rights.

This confusion, to put it mildly, is of no service to our country and of still less service to the Negro people. On the first point, no thoughtful and sincere spokesman for the Negro

people will pose victory in the war against Negro rights. He understands that the two are inseparable, for the simple reason that victory for fascism would not only rob the American nation of its independence and democratic gains but would mean the greatest disaster particularly for the Negro people.

The real question has been how to strengthen our war effort by securing equal rights for the Negro people and that is how the Communists have placed this question. Earl Browder has repeatedly declared in behalf of the Communist movement:

"The Jim-Crow system is the outgrowth of the ideology of 'white supremacy' which is just as shameful and dangerous for America as Hitler's identical racialism proved to be for Germany and the world. . . . JIM CROW MUST GO IF AMERICA IS TO STAND."

Is this what is called "stopping" the fight for Negro rights?

Had the Negro people followed the counsel of disregarding their stake in the war it would not only have weakened national unity against fascism but would have undermined the historic and undeniable advances of the Negro people during the war.

Had they followed this policy they would have betrayed the American labor movement which as a result of the efforts of the Communists has emerged as the strongest champion of Negro rights. Labor rightly regards this war against fascism as its own most sacred war. Surely to ask the Negro people to let down their labor allies raises the question of the soundness of this whole policy; and the best proof of the correctness of the Negro people joining with white labor in national unity behind the war, is the leading role which labor has played during this war in fighting for and securing Negro rights.

What is involved here is not the question of the Communists "stopping" the fight for Negro rights but the whole question of what is the best path for the Negro people. The Communists raised the Negro question as a national question and a question of democracy and proceeded to organize the struggle for equal rights. In this war it received its greatest test.

As a result of this policy, first advanced by the Communists and the labor movement, the Negro people are one of the strongest sources of democratic strength in the country, successfully integrating themselves into the nation.

The alternative would have been helping fascism to victory by depriving our national unity of one of its important pillars—support of the Negro people—and depriving the Negro people of their most important ally—the white labor movement—and hampering the one administration, under President Roosevelt's leadership, which has done more for Negro rights than any other administration since Lincoln's day.

REPLY TO A LOADED QUESTION

By BENJAMIN J. DAVIS, Jr

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“**H**AVE Communists quit fighting for Negro rights?”— is, of course, a loaded question. Apparently, certain gentlemen on the affirmative are, at last, willing to confess that the Communists once did fight for Negro rights; and, I understand, honest confession is good for the soul. Communists have struggled along for Negro rights under the tremendous handicap of being without the eminent acknowledgement by these gentlemen of what we were doing, and have pulled through as best as they could. But we are nevertheless happy to see a past truth conceded about the Communists, even if it is done for the purpose of denying a present truth about the Communists.

The real question that certain of these gentlemen on the affirmative would like to discuss is the Communists' position in support of the war. For them the query, “Have Communists quit fighting for Negro rights?”, is a smoke screen to conceal

their own internal, unresolved conflict on how they stand on the war. Communists are unequivocal on this question. They regard this war as what it is—a just and patriotic people's war of national liberation, to rid the world of fascism and all its works, and to build a durable peace of security, freedom and prosperity for all mankind. Communists are proud of their self-sacrificing support of our country and the United Nations in this war and join with all Americans—black and white—in placing victory in the war and in the peace above all else.

The greatest service that can be contributed to Negro rights is unconditional support of the war, without which equality and freedom is impossible for any people. Anyone who is equivocal on this supreme task cannot help and is not helping the cause of Negro rights—he is helping Hitler and world fascism.

The abolition of Jim Crow, anti-Semitism and all other forms of racial discrimination on the home front is a part of this worldwide struggle. The Communists were the first to insist that precisely because we are engaged in a struggle against world fascism, our country must cleanse itself of all "white supremacy" practices at home now. Said Earl Browder, now President of the Communist Political Association, in 1942: "These issues (fight against Jim Crow—B.D.) cannot be evaded or glossed over. It is not a contribution to national unity to be silent about them. This is not something that can be postponed in the interests of national unity for victory, for this is of the very essence of democracy, and the remedy of these profound abuses a precondition for victory." Again, in his book, *Teheran—Our Path in War and Peace*, published in 1944, Browder said: "Jim Crow must go, if America is to stand." This, of course, is not an isolated precept, but constitutes a guide to action for all Communists.

Like Frederick Douglass, who supported Lincoln in the Civil War against chattel slavery and simultaneously fought against Jim Crow bars in the Union armies, the Communists today support President Roosevelt in the war against fascist

slavery and simultaneously fight against fascist practices at home. Communists are resolutely fighting for the elimination of Scottsboro frame-ups in and out of the armed forces; for strong unions based upon the principle of equality of membership and equality of pay; for the abolition of the poll tax and the "white primary"; for decent facilities for underprivileged Negro communities; and for the immediate, unconditional citizenship of Negro Americans in all walks of life.

When, in 1943—to pardon a personal reference—both major parties failed to guarantee the election of a Negro to the City Council in New York, the Communists stepped into the breach, put forward a candidate on a non-partisan basis, and thus saved the biggest city in the world from the shame of no Negro legislative representation in the midst of a war for national liberation.

Conscious of the new and higher forms of struggle necessitated by the war crisis of our country, it is obvious that Communists have resolutely upheld the banner for the abolition of the Jim-Crow system. These facts are well-known among informed people; and it is futile to detail them at length to professional anti-Communists who make a living by vilifying and misrepresenting the Communists in order to paralyze, confuse and divide the people.

Such Red-baiters as the fifth column Trotskyites and the Norman Thomas "socialists," are the principal agitators of the query, "Have Communists quit fighting for Negro rights?" Their concern, however, is not for the Negroes; nor are they out to save the Communists from themselves. It is their purpose to sharpen their traitorous opposition to the war—a position subversive of Negro rights and the nation, but very helpful to Hitler. If a straightforward and not a loaded question is desired: When is this motley crew going to stop doing Hitler's dirty work in our country?



COMMUNISTS AND THE SCOTTSBORO CASE

By WILLIAM L. PATTERSON

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NEGRO America is becoming ever more conscious of the tremendous impetus the Communists have given to its battle for democracy, and of this historical role of the Communists. They are seeking further information regarding the Communists and their philosophy.

Even a casual examination of the great body of Communist literature will put one into possession of facts completely refuting the slander that they have deserted the oppressed of any racial-national or religious group.

From its inception the Communist Party has regarded the Negro problem as one of the most urgent of issues confronting American democracy. So the Communists have fought aggressively and zealously, persistently and systematically for an equal status for Negroes.

American Communists study every written word of Communists elsewhere who were or who ever had been confronted with the problem of liberating colonial peoples, national minorities, or oppressed nations. Their understanding of the

Negro question has deepened and matured with their experiences, and for the first time in the history of the United States they gave the question exact definition—that of an oppressed nation.

Perhaps the most famous and certainly one of the most effective of Communist-led campaigns is the Scottsboro case. Out of it the right of Negroes to sit on juries in the South was won again. That right had been surrendered by reaction when the Hayes-Tilden Compromise was consummated. Never before had there been so vigorous a defense of Negro victims of lynch terror since the Reconstruction era. The case was made a world cause because it was symbolic of Negro persecution. The world began to act on the treatment of black men in the greatest of the Western democracies. Negroes began to understand the forces aligned against them.

The Scottsboro case combining legal and mass defense represents but one of the many Communist methods of struggle. There was need to change tactics in the fight to aid the sharecroppers, to secure relief during the days of hunger under Hoover, and to combat Jim Crow and segregation. The Communists reacted to the new conditions, but always drew closer to the Negro people. A wealth of forms, shades, and methods of struggle for Negro rights resulted. Always, the Communists were seeking allies for the Negro people.

It was not alone the manner in which the Communists dramatized and politicalized the famous Scottsboro case that aroused democracy's enemies against them. Nor was it the desperate struggle led by the Communists to organize the sharecroppers of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In a quite unchallengeable manner, the Communists revealed the inseparable relation of the Negro problem to every other question of democracy. This it was that provoked the enemies of democracy and the Negro to rant and rage and seek to destroy that party. And, if today a new South is emerging, it is in no small measure due to this struggle.

The Communists warmly supported the nation-wide agita-

tion to organize the workers of basic industries into industrial unions. They sought tirelessly to integrate the Negro worker into the labor movement. The Negro could learn greater organization and discipline, struggling side by side with white labor. In the common fight the narrow nationalistic prejudices which white labor had accepted from the hands of the monopolists, who seek only to divide and conquer, would be broken down. On the economic front of struggle the Negro would learn through experience the true answer to the question: Who are the friends of the Negro people? In all of this, the judgment of the Communists was correct. The experiences in joint activities with white labor have been of inestimable value to Negro labor and the whole Negro people.

Nothing has contributed more to the political development of the Negro than the work of Communists within the labor movement to secure for him a place of equal opportunity. No one denies this. Some fear it. Others condemn it. Others recognize its essential democracy.

Communists are the greatest champions of national unity because they see that only through national unity can we solve the problems of war and peace, more than this, because it gives to every progressive force a voice of power. The Communists have defended with the greatest zeal the right of the Negro to a firm and secure position in the ranks of national unity.

Earl Browder, the leader of the Communist Political Association, said recently on the Negro question as it relates to the war:

"Here it would be disastrously destructive of national unity to try to make peace with the status quo, which is a status of a shameful heritage from chattel slavery based on Hitler-like racial conceptions. . . . We must as a war necessity, proceed to the systematic and relentless wiping out of every law, custom and habit of thought which in flagrant violation of our Constitution, enforces an unequal status between Negro and white citizens of the United States."

How are Communists carrying this question into life? They are initiating all forms of activity which broaden the Negroes' participation in the struggle for democracy.

But the Communists' greatest contribution to the struggles of the Negro is in the clarification of the war, expounding and disclosing the supreme virtues of national unity, the inestimable significance of the United Nations, embodied in the declarations of Moscow, Cairo, and Teheran.

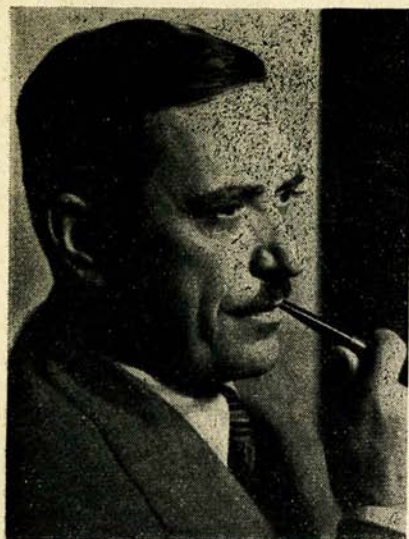
The war has changed America. It has changed the world. The Negro need no longer, indeed he can not now, fight alone. He is a part of a great democratic coalition. His problems are merged with the problems of the colonial peoples, the nations enslaved by Nazism, those who at home are menaced by unemployment in the post-war period. All of the issues of social security bear directly on him because of the weakness of his economic position. The gains made in the war are proof of this.

The solution of all these issues rests in the realization of the momentous Declarations issued by Messrs. Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin together with the Economic Bill of Rights of the Roosevelt government. Negro boys died in the jungles of India that lynching may be ended in the jungles of Mississippi. Fascism in all its forms must be rooted out everywhere or nowhere is democracy safe. Democracy is indivisible. The first task before mankind, seeking freedom from tyranny and want, is the destruction of the base of fascism.

Millions who yesterday ignored or were indifferent to the issue of Negro rights are today in the forefront of the battle to secure them for the black man. Behind this change in attitude lies the whole background of struggle led by Communists. Today, although Communists no longer constitute a political party, their outlook toward the extension of our democracy has not weakened. It is richer and deeper.

The Communists everywhere are part of the great democratic forces now on the march to crush the German and Japanese fascist bid for world conquest. They are fighting for

a world of free men. In the eyes of the Negro, they have given new content and meaning to the dignity of manhood. To raise the question of whether they have deserted the struggles of the Negro is to show a lack of understanding of Communist philosophy or to consciously seek to deceive the people, or both.



ON THE NEGROES AND THE RIGHT OF SELF- DETERMINATION*

By EARL BROWDER

*President
Communist Political Association*

IT IS, of course, known to you that the Negro people, after the Civil War, decided that their future lay in integrating themselves into the American nation as a whole. They expected to achieve this through the Republican Party, but they were sorely disappointed in this expectation. The Republican Party capitalized on the Negro vote by appearing in the historic role of liberator of the slaves. But it betrayed the Negro people after Lincoln's death. The Democratic Party, which had been the historic party of slavery, crushed the aspirations of the Negroes in the South with the connivance of the Republican Party.

In the late 20's and early 30's, it became clear that the whole world was heading toward a major crisis, the greatest of all

* Excerpts from the remarks of Earl Browder on November 19, 1943, to the final session of the two-weeks full-time morning school on the Negro People and the War, organized by the Workers School, New York. First published in *The Communist*, January, 1944.

history. It simultaneously became clear that the question of the future of the Negro people would be up for re-examination. It was in view of the gathering world crisis that we Communists at that time—in the early 30's—raised the issue of self-determination. At that time we necessarily faced the possibility that the Negro people, disappointed in their aspiration for full integration into the American nation, might find their only alternative in separation and in the establishment of their own state in the Black Belt, in the territory in which they are a majority. We raised this as one of the rights of the Negro people, in case the Negro people found this was the only way to satisfy their aspirations.

Now we are in the midst of this world crisis, anticipated in the beginning of the 30's. It has already taken shape, very definitely, to the point that we can foresee the outcome of it and the alignment of forces which determine that outcome. In this world crisis the solution of the question has become clear now, without any manner of doubt. The crisis of history has taken a turn of such character that the Negro people in the United States have found it possible to make their decision once and for all. Their decision is for their complete integration into the American nation as a whole, and not for separation.

This decision has been taking shape for several years. I think it is only comparatively recently that we can say it has taken a definite form, which no foreseeable development could now change. It began when the Democratic Administration, under Roosevelt, began to interest itself particularly in the fate of the Negro people, and when it carried the W.P.A. into the South. This was the beginning of a deep-going change, a shaking up of the whole semi-feudal system of oppression of the Negroes, and the opening up of the vista of a progressive establishment of Negro equality.

After this beginning came the penetration of the South by the C.I.O., and the organization of labor, black and white, in one united labor movement in the very heart of the oppression

of the Negroes, the home of the most extreme forms of Jim-Crowism. It was followed by the establishment of the President's Fair Employment Practices Committee.

And as part of this whole development, and the marked growth of unity of action of the Negro people and the progressive labor movement, we witness the drive for the abolition of the poll tax, the major instrument of disfranchisement of Negroes and poor whites in the South.

Then, we should also mention such symptomatic manifestations of this major progressive tendency as the recent elections, when Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., was elected to the New York City Council by a combined vote of Negroes, trade unionists and progressive white people.

We have seen also that the Negro people, despite all mistreatment, which continues and which has been especially severe in the armed forces, have been among the most determined in demanding their place in the war effort. Far from demanding separate military units, they have conducted a fight for the abolition of Jim-Crowism in the army and the joint participation of Negroes and whites in the units of the armed forces.

The decision of the Negro people is, therefore, already made. It is that the Negro people do see the opportunity, not as a pious aspiration for an indefinite future, but as an immediate political task under the present system, of approximating the position of equal citizens in America. This is in itself an exercise of the right of self-determination by the Negro people. By their attitude, the Negro people have exercised their historical right of self-determination.

We have today to establish the guarantees that there will not be a disappointment such as was administered by the Republican Party after the Civil War.

Therefore we see now, sharply and clearly, the right of the Negroes as a people to the determination of their own destiny. It is just as much an inviolable right as it ever was; and that right is being exercised today in the form of a decision by the

Negro people themselves, without any pressure from special interests, to choose the path of the integration of the Negroes into the whole American nation as one united nation.

It is this choice which gives the possibility in this period of integrating the Negro people into the general democracy of our country, on the basis of complete and unconditional equality, of solving this question now, and of no longer postponing it. The immediate achievement in this period, under the present American system, of complete equality for the Negroes, has been made possible by the war crisis, and by the character of this war as a people's war of national liberation. In the process of solving the greater problem of the whole world, we can and we must find the solution of full and equal citizenship for American Negroes in this country.

I think that we can expect clarity on this question to increase, with the unity of all progressive forces in America. America can expect in the next few years to achieve an approximation of the full aim in this respect.

I won't promise that, ten years from now we shall be able to say of the United States what someone, in one of the panels of the recent Congress of American-Soviet Friendship, said in introducing a prominent speaker—that in the Soviet Union there is no problem of national minorities any more. Perhaps that complete and unconditional achievement is possible only under socialism. But I think we can say that an approximation of that achievement is within our reach today under capitalism, under the existing American system, under the changing relationship of forces, in which labor and the people exert an ever increasing political role and influence.

It is achievable because America, after a long period of flirting with the fascist and Nazi forces of the world, has finally taken the path of unification of all progressive forces in the world for the destruction of fascism. When America confirmed that course, in the Moscow Agreements of a few weeks ago, it decided for a whole period of history the question of the possibility of national unity in the United States. It deter-

mined the possibility of eliminating all the gross inequalities as they manifest themselves in the oppression of the Negro people in this country.

All the decisive forces of history are now working for Negro equality, and we Communists must strengthen our collaboration with these progressive forces of which we are a vital part.

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By Earl Browder

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