

WE REMEMBER HIM FOR HIS CHARACTER

By W. E. B. DuBOIS

This tribute to James W. Ford, Negro Communist leader, who died June 21, was read by the famous Negro historian and sociologist, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, at a memorial meeting June 25 attended by several hundred persons.

James Ford was a man to be remembered for his character. That is a word which we do not use often today. We speak of what a man has done or what he possesses. We relate what positions of influence he has occupied. For none of these things are we remembering James Ford tonight. He was, to be sure, a good citizen. He worked for a living. He served as a soldier. He obeyed the law.

But it was not so much what he did as how he did it and why. It was for the kind of human being he was rather than what he accomplished that we honor him tonight, because it is the doer rather than the deed that makes civilization. Massive and magnificent as the building may be, it is the soul and sight of the architect which spells its meaning. The doer transcends the deed and this great truth the world in each age must learn anew.

James Ford was honest; he had manners; he respected women. He could and did work and he was a



JAMES W. FORD

straightforward radical.

Let us examine this list of virtues. When James Ford talked, he said what he meant. His words did not have two meanings, and you could believe in his honesty. He might be

wrong, but he was honestly wrong. He was a man of good manners. He was neither loud nor rude, but courteous and dignified. He regarded women neither as playthings to be pawed over, nor beasts of bur-

den, but as co-workers with whom he did his share of work. He was a man who did an honest job of work, toiling long and thoroughly until the end.

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HE WAS a radical; not one who cursed and complained, but one who believed that this nation needed fundamental change and could get it by clear thinking and right voting. The child of a Negro artisan and a servant, he knew poverty and worked hard for an education, interrupted it to fight as a soldier in the First World War, and completed his education after an honorable discharge from the ranks. He became a socialist because he believed that the object of industry was the welfare of the mass of the people and not the wealth of the few.

He became a member of the Communist Party because he believed that its program of complete socialism was better than any plan of partial or gradual socialism. He became a candidate for the Vice-Presidency on the Communist ticket and campaigned on a platform of peace and reason, leading by open democratic processes to change in our form of economic organization.

He and his party failed, not because he was outvoted, but because the nation never had the opportunity to know what the object of Communism was nor what it had accomplished in the Soviet Union or China. Nor could Americans know the advance which socialism had made and is making all over the civilized world. In addition to

a totally false picture of the socialist world and a terrible memory of war, there was added a charge of planned murder and treason against Communist leaders, which led to imprisonment of men for what they were said to think and for nothing they ever did.

Through this time of disappointment and despair, James Ford walked calm and upright, insisting on his beliefs and still expressing his determination to work for a radical reform of this nation.

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ON THE fundamental proposition which the Socialists and Communists placed before the nation, the people of the United States never voted, and never had a chance to vote. We went into the First World War after an overwhelming vote for peace. We fought the Second World War side by side with the Communist Soviet Union who conquered Hitler for us. We went into the Korean War against China without any vote at all. Yet we call this a free democracy of the west.

During this time, James Ford went his quiet, courteous way, stating his beliefs and reiterating his platform. There was little he or any radical could do amid cowardice and silence, surrounded by spies and liars. But what Ford did he did openly and clearly, and especially he tried to allay panic and surrender among his own comrades.

His last work was to arouse American Negroes to a realization of what their African cousins were doing to build Socialist states. To this man, our deep appreciation and reverence.