

A WORKER'S VICTORY FOR THE FREEDOM TRAIN

Full Text of address of William Hood, Recording Sec'y Local 600 UAW-CIO and President, National Negro Labor Council, Delivered at Cincinnati, Ohio, October 27-28

UNCLE TOM IS DEAD

BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

This is an historic day. On this day we, the delegated representatives of thousands of workers, black and white, dedicate ourselves to the search for a new North Star, the same star that Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner and John Brown saw rise over the city of Cincinnati over a century ago.

We come conscious of the new stage in the Negro peoples' surge toward freedom. We come to announce to all America and to the world, that Uncle Tom is dead. "Old Massa" lies in the cold, cold grave. Something new is cooking on the Freedom Train.

We come here today because we are conscious at this hour of a confronting world crisis. We are here because many of our liberties are disappearing in the face of a powerful war economy and grave economic problems face working men and women everywhere. No meeting held anywhere in America at this mid-century point in world history can be more important nor hold more promise for the bright future toward which humanity strives than this convention of our National Negro Labor Council. For here we have gathered the basic forces of human progress; the proud black sons and daughters of labor and our democratic white brothers and sisters whose increasing concern for democracy, equality and peace is America's bright hope for tomorrow.

We, the Negro working sons and daughters, have come here to Cincinnati to keep faith with our forefathers and

mothers who landed right here from the banks of the Ohio River in their dash for freedom from chattel slavery through the underground railroad. We come here to pledge ourselves that the fight for economic, political and social freedom which they began, shall not have been in vain.

Yes, we are here as proud black American working men and women; proud of the right to live, not humiliated any. We are proud, too, because of our democratic white brothers and sisters who have come here; proud because these staunch allies are not afraid to stand shoulder to shoulder with us to fight for that which is right.

The Negro Labor Council is our symbol, the medium of expression of our aims and aspirations. It is the expression of our desire and determination to bring to bear our full weight to help win first-class citizenship for every black man, woman and child in America. We say that these are legitimate aims. We say that these aspirations burn fiercely in the breast of every Negro in America. And we further say that millions of white workers echo our demands for freedom. These white workers recognize in their struggle for Negro rights, the prerequisites of their own aspirations for a full life and a guarantee that the rising tide of fascism will not engulf America.

And we say that those whites who call the National Negro Labor Council "subversive" have an ulterior motive. We know them for what they are—the common oppressors of both people, Negro and white. We charge that their false cry of "subversive" is calculated to maintain and ex-

tend that condition of common oppression. We say to those whites: "You have never seen your mothers, sisters and daughters turned away from thousands of factory gates, from the air-lines, the offices, stores and other places of desirable employment, insulted and driven into the streets many times when they tried to eat in public places—simply because of their color. You have never been terrorized by the mob, shot in cold blood by the police; you have never had your home burned when you moved out of the ghetto into another neighborhood—simply because you were black. You are not denied the franchise; you are not denied credit in banks, denied insurance, jobs and upgrading—because of the pigmentation of your skin. You are not denied union membership and representation. You do not die ten years before the rest of the people because of these many denials of basic rights.

Therefore, you who call this National Negro Labor Council "subversive" cannot understand the burning anger of the Negro people, our desire to share the good things our labor has produced for America. You do not understand this. So you sit like Walter Winchell, one of our attackers, in the Stork Club in New York and see that great Negro woman artist, Josephine Baker, humiliated and not raise a finger.

The Negro Labor Council is dedicated to the proposition that these evils shall end and end soon. The world must understand that we intend to build a stronger bond of unity between black and white workers everywhere to strengthen American democracy for all. If this be subversion—make the most of it!

A most significant event took place in Chicago in June of 1950. Over nine hundred delegates, Negro and white, gathered there to chart a course in the fight for Negro rights. They came from the mines, mills, farms and factories of America. Many of them were leaders in the organized labor movement: seasoned, militant fighters. They voiced the complaints of Negro America.

BILL OF PARTICULARS

The delegates were told that as you looked throughout the land you could see Negro-men and women standing in long lines before the gates of the industrial plants for jobs, only to be told that no help was wanted—while at the same time white workers were hired. Negro women are denied the right to work in the basic sections of American industry, on the airlines, in the stores and other places. Those who were hired into industry during World War II have for the most part been systematically driven out—often in violation of union contracts. Vast unemployment since the war has struck the Negro community a severe blow.

UP-GRADING

In thousands of factories throughout the land Negroes were denied upgrading and better job opportunities. Too often the unions did not defend or fight for the right of the Negro workers to be upgraded.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

We heard there in Chicago that Negro workers were denied any opportunity to participate in the great number of apprenticeship training programs either in industry or in government, in such fields as the building trades, machine tools, printing and

SOUTHERN ECONOMY

Our black brothers and sisters from the South told of unemployment, low wages, wage differentials, Jim Crow unions, peonage, sharecrop robbery and miserable destitution. They described the perpetuation of conditions that are cruelly reminiscent of slavery in Twentieth Century America.

TRADE UNION JOB DISCRIMINATION

Black firemen and brakemen came to tell of the collusive agreements between railroads and the Railroad Brotherhoods to throw Negroes out of the railroad industry after a hundred years or more. And of the denial of union membership in these unions and no representation. A number of AF of L unions were singled out for their policy of exclusion and job "monkey business" as regards black workers. We also learned that the CIO had joined the war crowd of colonial oppression and exploitation and was running fast from its early position of the thirties when John L. Lewis was at its head and it really fought for Negro rights.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Many of the delegates were stunned to hear of the thousands of denials of civil rights in public places in every state in the union. We were saddened and angered when we heard about the frameups of the Martinsville Seven, Willie McGhee, the Trenton Six and of countless other Negroes because they were black and for no other reason. We were horrified to hear of the many police killings of Negroes from New York City to Birmingham,

THE MANDATE

Is there any wonder then that this great Chicago gathering of the black working sons and daughters of our land said that this oppression can no longer exist in our America? Or is it any wonder that we received the full support of those stalwart, democratic white workers present there who truly love democracy and recognize our common, basic unity of interests? So it was that they, in all righteous indignation, gave unto us the continuators' organization, a mandate. They said to us: "Go out and build strong the Negro Labor Councils throughout the land. Build them into instruments of democracy, equality and unity."

They gave unto us the main task of fighting on that front which we knew best—the economic front for jobs, upgrading, for an end to the lily-white shops, for apprenticeship training, government jobs, local and State fair employment practices legislation, the non-discrimination clause in union contracts and finally, with emphasis, the right of Negro women to work anywhere and everywhere.

They gave unto us the mandate to build an organization composed in the main of Negro workers, united and determined to wage an uncompromising struggle against Jim Crow—to build an organization which can unite with white workers who are willing to accept and support our program—to exclude no freedom fighter!

That mandate commissioned us to cooperate with those existing organizations, community and trade union, which have



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against us and get a taste of freedom before they die. . . . Now suppose you were Indo Chinese, wouldn't you be amazed at us? For over 100 years the French have been in Indo China, dominating them politically, strangling them economically, and humiliating them in the land of their fathers.

"We haven't ever sat down with the French and demanded that they change that system. And in the defect of leadership on our part, they have turned to the Communists, and the Communists have given them leaders, they have trained their troops, and given them money and now it looks as though they can win and as they are about to win their liberty, we rush up to the scene and say, 'Dear Brothers, what on earth are you all getting ready to do? Are you going to throw yourselves into the hands of this diabolical conspiracy under the false notion they can bring you freedom? Why, they aren't free; we are the free people of the world, we have democratic institutions, we are your friends, we will send you leaders, we will send your ammunition, we will send you bread.'

"And they look at us in amazement and they say, 'Brother, where have you been? Why if we'd a-known you was a-coming we'd have baked a cake.'"

And, believe it or not, Phil Murray agreed with the speech. He said, said he: "It was an inspirational address that could only come from the soul of a man."

MOVEMENT OF STRUGGLE

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

We heard there in Chicago that Negro workers were denied any opportunity to participate in the great number of apprenticeship training programs either in industry or in government, in such fields as the building trades, machine tools, printing and engraving, and other skilled fields.

LILY-WHITE SHOPS

We found out there that thousands of lily-white shops exist throughout the land where no Negro has ever worked.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT

We discovered that federal, state and city governments maintain a severe policy of Jim Crow discrimination, beginning with the White House and moving on down to the lowest level of municipal government.

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Negro families were still hemmed into the ghettos, charged higher rents, chained by restrictive covenants, mob terror and finally even bombed if they were not lucky or able to move out in time. The rats are given ample opportunity to wreak their damage upon human beings, their destruction through disease and death.

Our delegates made it clear in that 1950 convention that inferior Jim Crow schools are still the policy in the South and Jim Crow quotas in the colleges of the North. The desire of black children for education and a full, useful life is yet a dream unrealized.

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That mandate commissioned us to cooperate with those existing organizations, community and trade union, which have undertaken genuine campaigns for the full citizenship of the Negro people.

We were directed to build a new type of organization—not an organization to compete with those existing organizations of the Negro people already at work on many civil rights struggles. The delegates who met at Chicago demanded an organization of Negro workers from a wide variety of industries, organized and unorganized, from the great industrial centers of the North, the urban communities of the South and the farm workers from the great rural areas. Such an organization will encourage Negroes to join unions and urge unions to organize Negroes. It will call upon the entire Negro people to support labor's fight.

WE, SPEAK OUT FOR OUR FREEDOM

Unity of Negro and White Basis for Victory for Labor and Negro People

TO THE NEGRO PEOPLE

To the Negro people they told us to say: In the Civil War thousands upon thousands of Negro workers who took arms in the Union cause won, not only their own freedom—the freedom of the Negro people—but by abolishing the institution of slave labor, provided the basis for the development of free trade unions in the United States.

And so, even today, as the National Negro Labor Council charts the course ahead to help the whole Negro people and their sincere allies, we sound a warning note to American reaction and bigotry. For if fifteen million Negroes, led by their alert sons and daughters of labor, and united together and joined by the 15 million organized white workers in the great American labor movements say that there shall be no more Jim Crow in America—then there shall be no more Jim Crow!

If 30 million Americans—15 million Negro people united with 15 million workers—join with the Jewish people to say there shall be no more anti-Semitism, and mean it, then there will be no more anti-Semitism!

If fifteen million Negroes, inspired by their true leaders of labor, united with their natural allies in the trade unions, demand an end to the persecution of the foreign-born, then the persecution of the foreign-born will end!

If these 30 million—black and white alike—say: "Leave DuBois and Robeson and Patterson alone, for they speak for our freedom"—they will be left alone!

If this same combination speaks with one united voice for peace—America will make peace!

We, your black sons and daughters, pledge to you that we have a pool of mighty strength to put at your service, to the end that you will have economic, political and social equality, so that you might enjoy the great and good things of our land.

We say to you: "Be confident for we have brought to this great, democratic fight many white workers who love democracy and who know that we have worked side by side with them, fought side by side with them on the picket lines against the giant corporations. And they know that we know—and will not be divided from us no matter what.

There are great walls in our U. S. Democracy. There are great barriers behind which men's minds, souls, bodies and spirits are imprisoned by poverty, illiteracy, disease, and deceit. With our new John Browns we will break down these discriminatory barriers. Yes, we will break down these great walls of hypocrisy, together with our new John Browns, and march on for full and complete emancipation for the Negro people.

And behind the fifteen million Negroes of the United States stand 180 million of our African brothers and sisters, sixty million of our kindred in the West Indies and South and Central America—for whom, as for us, war and the Point Four program would mean continued slavery and exploitation.

As our new and so vitally needed organization enters into the fight for the rights of the Negro people, we extend our hand in unity and cooperation to other great Negro organizations which have historically struggled for these objectives. And we may repeat here that we are mandated to concentrate our fire upon that area we as workers know best—the economic front.

To George Schuyler of the Pittsburgh Courier, to Lester

Granger of the Urban League, to Councilman Jesse D Locker of Cincinnati—all of whom attacked our Council at the beck and call of the big white folks, we warn you: "Negro America is mad, hurt and humiliated. You have spent your lives growing fat on Jim Crow while our brothers and sisters cannot find jobs, are shot down in cold blood, have their homes burned and bombed. You may yell when the big white folks tell you to, in order to keep us down, but the day of the white-haired "Uncle Toms" and the sleek "Uncle Thomas" is at an end.

Since June of last year, Negro Labor Councils have sprung up throughout the country—North, East, South and West. The response of Negro workers to the opportunity to unite their strength has been overwhelming. The only question most of them have asked is whether or not the Council is a hard-hitting organization.

Our Councils have begun tackling the task given us by the Chicago Conference for Negro Rights. A number of Councils are carrying on campaigns to end discrimination in apprenticeship training set up by the skilled trades. We have sought to do this in conjunction with the unions in the field, the employer and government agencies.

Lest we be misunderstood, however, we intend to take any and all necessary steps to win. We have begun campaigns to convince the trade unions to adopt our model anti-discrimination contract clause. We have been carrying on campaigns for City and State FEPC legislation with teeth. The outstanding of such campaigns was a campaign led in Detroit by the Greater Detroit Negro Labor Council. Our Council there secured some forty thousand signatures to petitions for referendum by the voters of Detroit. The enemies of FEPC and the mealy-mouth hush-hushers did and are doing everything they can to keep fair employment practices off the ballot, while the City Council still refuses to pass any FEPC legislation.

During the course of our Council building there has been opposition from some of the trade union leaders, particularly to this Convention. They have accused us of attempting dual unionism, and some of them have gone so far as to advise Negro workers not to participate in this convention. To them we say: "Look at the Bill of Particulars," then tell us if it is not true that we are second-class citizens in this land. Negroes are still barred from many trade unions in this country, denied apprenticeship training, upgrading and refused jobs in many, many places.

We are not represented in the policy-making bodies of most International unions. We say when the mobs came to Emerald Street in Chicago and to Cicero, Illinois, we did not see the great trade unions move. Yet, the basic right to live in Cicero was denied, not only to the family of Harvey Clark, but to the Negro people as a whole. We say that we will no longer permit the denial of these basic rights in our country, and are pooling our strength for that purpose. We intend to do it on the basis of cooperation and unity, wherever possible, with the organized labor movement.

We wish to say further that the day has ended when white trade union leaders or white leaders in any organization may presume to tell Negroes on what basis they shall come together to fight for their rights. Three hundred years has been enough of that. We ask for your cooperation—but we do not ask your permission!

We believe it to be the solemn duty of trade unions every-

where, as a matter of vital self-interest, to support the Negro workers in their efforts to unite and to play a more powerful role in the fight of the Negro people for first-class citizenship based upon economic, political and social equality. We believe, further, that it is the trade unions' duty and right to encourage the white workers to join with and support their Negro brothers and sisters in the achievement of these objectives.

Since June of last year many things have happened—the frame-up victims, Willie McGhee, the Martinsville Seven and many others have died. Mobs came to Cicero, home burnings and bombings took place, the Klan rides openly again, the old Confederate flag is being displayed openly throughout America and often as a battle flag of our troops in Korea—this ancient symbol of slavery and oppression. A war in Korea has involved our country with the colonial people of Asia. The Taft-Hartley Act, the Smith Act and the McCarran Act, under the hysterical lashings of the McCarthy's and other neo-fascists threatens to destroy all civil liberties. The Negro Labor Council, therefore, has come into being at a time when democracy needs fearless champions.

We accept this role that history has thrust upon us; we gladly act as America's conscience. We warn America that the whole world watches. World peace hangs in the balance while the majority of the world's people are exploited and oppressed.

THE PATHWAY TO PEACE

Dr. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, in a speech made at the 1950 CIO Convention also warned our country when he said in his address, "The Pathway to Peace":

"Now, let us take a look in all humility at these free peoples that we are. Who are they? Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Germany and the United States. We are indeed the free peoples in the sense that our domestic institutions are the free-est and the most flexible institutions on earth, but there isn't a one of us, especially our European allies, who hasn't been busy during the last two hundred years securing and sustaining their freedom by the political domination, economic exploitation and social humiliation of over half of the human race."

I further quote Dr. Mordecai Johnson:

"If we look at ourselves in the way that history shows it to us, we are probably the most ruthless dominators and exploiters and humiliators of human life that ever spanned the pages of history. For all of a hundred years now, we have had in our hands scientific and technical intelligence. The most creative weapon of economic and political constructiveness that ever came into the hands of men. We have shown what we could do with that weapon by building up the great economic and political structure of the United States and Britain, France, Germany, and Japan.

"But for 200 years, while we have had it in our power to build up likewise, the economic and political freedom of India, Africa, China, Malaya, Indo China and the peoples of the Near East, we not only have not done so, but we have used that very power to conquer them in war, to dominate them politically, to exploit their natural resources and their labor, and to segregate and humiliate them upon the land upon which their fathers have died and in the presence of the graves which hold the bodies of their mothers.

"For over 100 years there have been over a billion human beings who have been seething with indignation

And, believe it or not, Phil Murray agreed with the speech. He said, said he: "It was an inspirational address that could only come from the soul of a man."

MOVEMENT OF STRUGGLE

Brothers and sisters! Eloquence is a mighty weapon in the struggle for our just demands. But what is more eloquent than the struggle itself? The big white bosses, the men in Washington, will move far more rapidly when they see millions of us in struggle than when they hear speeches alone.

The Negro Labor Councils are above all organizations of struggle. We stand for the unity of all Negro workers, irrespective of union affiliation, organized and unorganized; for the unity of Negro and white workers together; for the unity of Negro workers with the whole Negro people in the common fight for Negro liberation; and for the alliance of the whole Negro people with the organized labor movement—the keystone combination for any kind of democratic progress in our country.

With this in mind, and looking forward to the building of a mighty movement of Negro Labor Councils throughout the length and breadth of the land, it is my opinion that this founding convention should be remembered in the years to come as the gathering which launched a major, nation-wide struggle to win a basic demand of the Negro workers and the Negro people as a whole.

For this reason I propose that this Founding Convention project a central national campaign for an Executive Order from the President of the United States to establish a Federal Fair Employment Practices Order and a Federal Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce it.

This campaign should aim at securing the signatures of hundreds of thousands—yes, millions—of Americans, Negro and white, on a national petition. It should include mass meetings, use of radio and television, a drive to secure union endorsements for the Executive Order, and support from the most varied community organizations. It should sponsor a tour of prominent speakers. It should look to Negro History Week in February, 1952, as a milestone in that campaign, during which period notice should be served on the President that he is expected to act—and not just double-talk—for the Executive Order.

Such a national campaign will bring the Negro Labor Councils' movement into hundreds of cities and communities of our country. Many tens of thousands of new workers will thereby learn of this great movement for the first time. It will provide a splendid opportunity to establish new councils and further build the existing ones. It will spark our great organizing drive.

It will also provide a new opportunity for cooperation with the various unions and the important civic, fraternal and church organizations among the Negro people, thereby furthering our basic principle of unity.

Such a national campaign, far from hindering local campaigns for FEPC, for housing, against discrimination and Jim Crow, will serve to stimulate and advance them.

This Convention will also adopt a Constitution and Preamble and other important documents, all of which are of utmost importance. These, too, are instruments in the fight. For nothing we say or write here will have any meaning in the weeks and months to come unless we recognize that they are our battle-flags. And battle-flags are meant to be carried into battle. Our great documents, our great battle-flags, must not be wrapped up and put away for two years after we adjourn here tomorrow. We must carry our fighting standards out of this convention, unfurled and into battle.

We face a number of grave tasks. We are called upon to chart a course that will win thousands of new job opportunities for Negro men and women, that will convince the organized labor movement to complete the organization of the South on the basis of equality and non-segregation, that will help bring the franchise to all the peoples in the South.

We are on the high road to a more democratic America. We are on the way toward breaking the grip of the Dixiecrats and the Northern reactionaries on our national life. I know that as you hammer out a program in these two days you will speed up the Freedom Train; you will give greater spirit and meaning to the Negro Labor Councils; you will adopt the battle-cry of the great Frederick Douglass: "Without struggle there is no progress."

We move on, united—and man nor beast will turn us back. We will achieve, in our time, for ourselves and for our children, a world of no Jim Crow; of no more "white men's jobs" and "colored only" schools; a world of freedom, full equality, security, and peace. Our task is clearly set forth. Brothers and sisters, we move on to struggle and to victory!