

Toward Freedom

ORGANIZED labor and the Negro people had better think deeply about the wide use which New York newspapers were able to make of Negro salesmen in their efforts to break the recent strike of the newspaper and Mail Deliverers' Union. Herein lie lessons of vital importance to labor, the Negro and to the nation as a whole.

New Yorkers must have been impressed by the large number of Negro men, women and children selling copies of strike-bound papers. There were hundreds of them—in downtown Manhattan, Harlem, Brooklyn and Bronx. Most frequently they were selling that anti-labor, anti-Negro, anti-everything-else-decent sheet, the *Daily News*.

These salesmen were playing the role of strike-breakers, helping the bosses in their efforts to defeat the Negro's staunchest ally, organized labor. Their sole motivation in most cases was simply to make some easy money quick, but the fact remains that they were serving as scabs.

The predominance of Negroes among strike-breaking newspaper salesmen was no accident. They were solicited through radio appeals (especially over the *News'* KNEW, whose swingband programs are very popular in Harlem), letters to Harlem ministers and other means. And the purpose was not merely to get additional salesmen—it was Negro salesmen that were wanted.

Here evident was the age-old tactic of employers to play upon the latent prejudices of white workers, to provoke sharp race conflict leading to violence, and then to use the resulting disturbance as a basis for demanding that the police be used for the forceful suppression of the strikers.



by Doxey A. Wilkerson

There was social dynamite in the publishers' widespread use of Negro strike-breaking salesmen. But for the discipline of the union it could very easily have exploded into a bloody race riot. Both the Negro and the union would have been heavy losers.

It is important to understand that at least some of the publishers counted on and sought to provoke such racial conflict as a strike-breaking tactic. Recall, for example, the *Daily News* front-page picture of a wounded white striker with blood streaming from his side, and the accompanying story alleging that he was stabbed on the picket-line by "unidentified" Negro salesmen. This was a downright lie. The striker's assailant was identified as Leonard Crassi, a white resident of the Bronx, who was later charged with felonious assault and held without bail. It appears that the *News* was deliberately trying to stir up racial conflict.

THIS tactic of stirring up Negro-white conflicts as a means of breaking unions is not new in American industry. It was widely used right after World War I, with enormous setbacks for the Negro and for organized labor. Henry Ford used it in trying to keep UAW from organizing his plant in Detroit. The Philadelphia Transit Co. tried it (with near disastrous consequences) in last summer's fight against TWU. It will be tried many times again during the period of social strains which mass reconversion lay-offs are already beginning to develop.

This is why both organized labor and the Negro people must learn and profit by the lessons of the recent newspaper deliverymen's strike.

FIRST, our unions must quickly step-up their programs for the education of white

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workers on the Negro question. More than this, they must act vigorously to uproot whatever discrimination there is within the unions themselves. Especially must they launch intensive struggles to destroy every vestige of Jimcrowism in their plants, to force the upgrading of Negro workers, and to negotiate employer-union programs to prevent lay-offs from eliminating Negro workers entirely, thus wiping out the Negro's hard-won wartime right to work.

It is not to help the Negro that these things must be done; it is to protect the unions against employer tactics of using racial prejudices and discrimination for union-busting ends.

THERE is only one effective defense against this foul race-baiting tactic: **Strengthen the unity of white and Negro workers within the union, and draw closer the bonds which now link the Negro people and the labor movement together as close allies.**

SECOND, Negro leaders—ministers, trade unionists, journalists, civic leaders and all others—must act quickly, while the newspaper strike is still fresh in mind, to drive home this basic lesson to the masses of Negro people: **The proper and necessary role of Negro workers is and must always be that of an ally of organized labor, fighting alongside the unions, in the shops and in the political arena, for the security of all workers. Never must Negroes allow themselves to be used by the bosses as strike-breakers against their fellow-workers.**

Our experiences during this people's war have brought a new unity and collaboration between the trade union movement and the Negro people. It must not be disrupted during this period of resurgent reaction. Indeed, it must be strengthened. Along this road alone lies triumph for the democratic forces of America.