

The Young Go First—for Peace

Thousands of them showed up from all America at the Town Meeting called by the Youth Congress. The gains made by the youth this past year. How they collaborate with labor.

IT WAS a mighty lively corpse that paraded through the streets of Washington on Town Meeting night, February 7. A year ago the Youth Congress had been pronounced dead. The small fry won't survive that, said the press, as the President twisted the knife into the thousands standing there in the rain. It only remained for some undertaker to bury the body beside the New Deal.

But 6,000 strong they came back this year, surprising even their leaders who had counted on only 3,000.

They had come a year ago, with the same problems to find an answer to, kids like these from Connecticut and California and Alabama and Minnesota. "Education, vocational training, employment at a living wage for all, preservation of the civil liberties proclaimed in the Bill of Rights, peace—these are our simple aims."

But this year there was a difference down in Washington, a great difference. Last year they met in the vast Labor Department auditorium; this year in Turner's Arena, with the microphone in a prize-ring. Last year Mrs. Roosevelt, the army, WPA had helped house them on a low-cost and non-Jim Crow basis. This year delegates slept in cars, packed into tiny rooms, relied upon the capital's ordinary folk to bed them down. Last year the government helped them evade Jim Crow by feeding them in the Labor Department cafeteria; this year thousands banged into Jim Crow in cafeterias and restaurants everywhere.

Last year the President allowed them to stand on the White House lawn. Last year Mrs. Roosevelt attended the sessions. Last year Aubrey Williams spoke to them. This year the only representatives of the administration were FBI men.

"Evidently there has been a change in somebody's program," said AYC Chairman Jack McMichael. "Who has done the changing: the rank-and-file young people of America or the national administration?"

TO PEOPLE in close touch with the youth movement during the past year the course of the change and the forces making the change had been pretty clear for some time. There had been the President's "twaddle" speech at the Youth Institute last February; there had been Mrs. Roosevelt's refusal to speak at the annual Youth Congress in Wisconsin this past summer. When it voted to oppose conscription and labeled aid to Britain a step toward war, she "came to the conclusion that it was useless to go on arguing indefinitely with them." So, from the policy of "kindness" and "understanding," the Roosevelt administration turned to bribery of the Youth Congress in the form of big money offers, and when that failed to turn it from its anti-war

course, intimidation and open attack were tried.

Not one of these techniques has succeeded. No part of the Youth Congress supported Roosevelt in the last election except the handful of Joe Lash's followers. And Christmas week, in New Brunswick, N. J., when this bought-and-paid-for "elder statesman" of the student movement tried to paste together with dollar bills a rival youth movement, he could find no takers.

So it was with the battle lines drawn that this Town Meeting of Youth opened. For the first time in years no administration big shots would be there. For the first time the Youth Congress would have to stand on its own legs and say its own piece. And it met the test, squarely and magnificently. Where last year great social forces had clashed through the personalities of Roosevelt and John L. Lewis, this year, in an arena provided by the Youth Congress, the young people themselves, 6,000 strong, were in there battling with the warmakers of the White House and Congress.

"When you get home," said Joe Cadden, the AYC's executive secretary, in the final speech of the Town Meeting, "you will find that the American Youth Congress has become known as the organization fighting for the defeat of the lend-lease bill."

And it was that rallying cry of alarm against the bill that would plow under every fourth American boy that began the Town Meeting, too, and rang through every hour it lasted. Friday night's meeting was transformed into an open hearing for progressive leaders who had had the doors of the House and Senate committees slammed in their faces. Jack McMichael, Frederick Field of APM, John P. Davis of the National Negro Congress, Mike Quill of the Transport Workers, Rev. Owen Knox of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, one after the other came swinging out in the center of the ring against the yes-men and the loyal opposition who were making a joke of democratic debate on the hill.

No speech was made on any topic those next days that did not attack passionately the war powers bill. In session after session the sharecropper from Missouri, the student from Wisconsin, the boy from Buick's assembly line, the millhand from North Carolina, the interne from New York, the waitress from Chicago, said what Congress would not allow them and their millions of folks back home to say, what the Senate Committee and the capital police stopped Jack McMichael from saying by arresting him. And in the way they said it you could see a big advance in their understanding of the character of this war. For a year and a half now their organizations have been fighting against the war on every

front, in their shops against the speedup, the accidents, the low wages; in their homes against the high price of meat and butter, in their schools against the Rapp-Coudert grillings and the censorship. And the lessons they have learned, plain in the hundred-odd swift speeches at Turner's Arena, many of which called the war "imperialist," were summed up in the report on "Keeping America Out of the War," delivered by Frances Williams, AYC leader, who quoted from Virgil Jordan's famous talk to the investment bankers to show just what kind of war this is.

IF ANYTHING MORE was needed to make the imperialist label stick fast, they got it in the speeches of the delegates from abroad. Lord Halifax's bloody deeds in India, the arrest of American youth's friend, Rajni Patel, the administration's feedline to Japan and trickery with the appeasers in China, the horrible living conditions of the colonial people in Puerto Rico and Haiti, were pounded home by delegates from these countries. Our unity with their young people was symbolized in the unforgettable moment when Jack McMichael stood with Liu Liang-Mo and sang a Chinese song he had learned in the front lines of China's fight a few years ago.

As strong as their feeling against the lend-lease bill was the Town Meeting's hatred for Jim Crow. Days before the opening meeting reports went out of the rigid color line being drawn in Washington. On every side housing and eating facilities were being denied to the Youth Congress. "Mrs. Roosevelt," said the *Herald Tribune* reporting her press conference, "admitted that it was difficult for an organization with both Negro and white delegates to find a place to meet and eat in the nation's capital, but she indicated she was not concerned with the problem."

Too busy "defending democracy" to help the Youth Congress get some. But it didn't discourage these youngsters. A delegation of eighteen from seven states walked into the office of the Chief of Staff of the US Army and told General Marshall they and the people they spoke for didn't like Jim Crow in the army, either. "I am completely satisfied," said the general, when they pointed to discrimination and segregation in the army.

On Sunday the Committee on Negro Discrimination, set up by the delegates as the meeting started, organized two picketing squads on the floor and a few minutes later hundreds of boys and girls captained by trade union organizers descended upon the Palace Lunch nearby the arena and the swanky Willard Hotel in midtown. Long lines marched round and round the Willard chanting, "Old Jim Crow has Gotta Go!" while the fatboys at the windows inside glared down upon them.

"Washington will know how young America feels about Jim Crow before we leave," said Marie Reed, the committee's chairman. And the next day a few-score delegates stayed over to picket the War Department building, forcing Secretary Stimson outside to read them a smug lecture congratulating himself on maintaining segregated Negro units in the army.

The bold fight these young people put up for Negro rights without Mrs. Roosevelt's helping hand was another sign of how deep the cleavage is now between the youth and the President's wife. It served, too, to expose her hypocrisy, for in that same press interview before the Town Meeting began, she had declared her disagreement with the AYC on foreign policy but had claimed agreement with them on issues of domestic importance. Challenging her demagoguery, Frances Williams told the Town Meeting: "It is no mere coincidence that today Mrs. Roosevelt, who supports all-aid-to-Britain, urges support this year of the universal forced labor camps for youth, while just a year ago she urged the AYC to support the American Youth Act."

JOE LASH, the administration's little generalissimo for the campaign to put over forced labor camps, was there at the Town Meeting in full force—he and a half-dozen others of his general staff bought up wholesale. In the last year his exclusive sponsors have put up thousands and thousands of dollars to finance Lash. The latest of his student outfits to invade the campus with White House blessings is the Student Defenders of Democracy. Examination of its listed sponsors indicates it is the holding company for the variety of fronts the all-aid-to-Britain boys have planted around the country. Herbert Bayard Swope, Jr., head of the Committee for Thirty Million, okayed by Gene Tunney and Murray Plavner of the Republicans, also sits with SDD's board. Another of its leaders is John Darnell, discredited lame-duck president of the National Student Federation, who tried unsuccessfully this Christmas to sell his organization to Lash's International Student Service.

Lash's reception at the Town Meeting showed what little response he has been getting from the masses of American youth. He tried the old line of disruption on points of order but so isolated was his effort that his own friend in the AYC cabinet, Harriet Pickens, was forced to tell him to sit down and shut up. His next effort was a speech at the civil liberties session, where he yelled through overwhelming boos that "England is fighting freedom's battle for the whole world." His last stand came the next day, during the discussion on the war. Warming up to a Red-baiting attack on the Youth Congress, almost the only one made with the exception of the one by a young Trotskyite, he argued that since the AYC opposed aid to Britain, which meant the government of that country, and the only force in England also to oppose that government was the British Communist Party, it followed that the Youth Congress was Communist.

That line was listened to in cold silence. Up to the mike stepped Ed Strong, leader of the Southern Negro Youth Congress, who presented the AYC's position and answered Lash at the same time. It is the people of England who are fighting this war, he said, but it is *also* the people of Germany and Italy. Lash forgot to mention this, and to add that it is the imperialist governments of all these countries that are running the war. American youth, Strong went on, do not want to help fight an imperialist war. Together with the People's Convention of England, they want to end this war with a people's peace. The standing ovation Strong's speech drew, balanced against the silence that met Lash's Red-baiting, marked the passing of the administration's influence among progressive youth.

Nor did the "fruit-basket" program of the long-count champ, Gene Tunney, get any further with the Town Meeting. Like a schoolboy making up to his teacher with a big red apple Murray Plavner delivered a basket of fruit at the White House door. And when the papers appeared with the ridiculous picture of Gene Tunney's kids, fruit in arms, the arena rocked with laughter.

"I wonder what kind of strange fruit it is?" said Joe Cadden. "Sour grapes, perhaps?"

These were the friends of Roosevelt at the Town Meeting—the tired Socialist, Joe Lash, and the whiskey mogul, Gene Tunney. Youth had other friends there, stronger, wiser, bolder—the millions of organized workers. Labor was there, straight from the field of battle—Tom Foley, chairman of Harvester's strike committee, speaking for the 6,500 Chicago workers who stood solid with the Youth Congress, and Ed Taylor, head organizer of the Ford drive, both of them greeted by tremendous applause and spontaneous chanting of "Organize Harvester!" "Organize Ford!" It was the result of a year's good work in the field by both AYC and union men who have been building close ties between organized youth and organized labor in shops and towns.

THE NEED for that labor and youth unity was put plainly by Roy Lancaster, speaking as Youth Director of Labor's Non-Partisan League. "Youth knows that the progressive labor movement is today its staunchest ally in the fight for youth rights, for jobs, for peace, and civil liberties. And labor knows that unless youth has decent jobs, higher wages, is organized into unions, that the low standards under which youth is working will be used to undermine and undercut any standards of work and wages won by labor through long struggle."

Lancaster's speech made much of the greatest single problem that faces both youth and labor today—the job training program and the administration's intention to use it as a wage-cutting, strike-breaking, union-smashing threat to organized labor. Both youth and labor are all for a real job training program; it was the AYC which first pointed to the need for it when it introduced the American Youth Act five years ago. But under "national defense" both industry and government are working

hand in hand to flood the labor market with a huge supply of cheap skilled and semi-skilled workers.

However, with 4,500,000 youth still unemployed, this means job training without jobs and the creation of a potential reserve of scab labor. It is just such urgent new problems which have led labor to take a much deeper interest in the youth movement. Signs of growing cooperation in day-to-day organization are plentiful.

Last month the New York CIO Industrial Council sponsored the first trade union youth conference. It has also set up a permanent Youth Committee within the CIO. Some unions have established programs designed to draw in young workers and activate them quickly. Local 65 of the Warehouse Union and the Fur Floor Boys Union, both of New York, have developed extensive programs of educational, social, and recreational activities that have every boy and girl in the union completely absorbed in them. In Connecticut, as in New York, model labor sports movements are well under way. Out in Pittsburgh the CIO has undertaken special youth clubs and Flint sent a young Buick worker, Charles Shinn, head of its CIO Youth Club, to the Town Meeting to make the chief report on the trade unions and conscription.

Conscription showed how alive the youth movement is to the needs and problems of labor today. The Youth Congress was the first people's organization to come forth with a full program in defense of the welfare of the conscripts and the unions patterned their programs upon it. Today the whole working class is vitally concerned with military life and the youth movement has taken the lead in fighting for the rights and welfare of its members in the armed forces. Together with the unions in several parts of the country it has been sending delegations to the conscript camps to check up on the treatment accorded the soldiers. As one Town Meeting delegate put it: "When we get into the army we won't forget we're trade unionists!"

Those words, and the great role played by the thousands of young delegates from the labor movement, augur well for the future of America's youth movement. Independent at last, with labor taking an ever-increasing part in its many activities, the Youth Congress will go on to organize more and more youth into the great people's movement of which it is a part. Already it has promised support to the American Peace Mobilization's national meeting against the war in New York on April 5, is arranging for Labor Day the first national congress of trade union youth to be held in this country, and is helping organize a national conference for democracy in education on March 29.

"The young go first," they used to say, speaking of armies in wartime. The young *are* going first now, but in a different way. Greater, more solidly united than any other movement in America, they go first in the fight for jobs and democracy and peace.

MILTON MELTZER.

Simon Legree Comes North

The travesty of a "national defense" which bars millions of Negroes from jobs. James Morison visits Connecticut, the "war boom country." What the Negroes are saying. First in a series.

WHEN you happen on the words "Jim Crow," you think of the South, that magnolia-clad Dixie of tumble-down shacks, wasted lands, and unhappy lives. But Jim Crow is a national institution, bred of greed and prejudice. And the current war hysteria, with its program of vast expenditures for armaments, its conscript armies, and its philosophy of "strength and discipline," is spreading Jim Crow like a plague.

The new war in "defense of democracy" is a hateful hypocrisy in Negro eyes. The Negro press, the Negro public in all parts of America is quoting facts and figures—a handful of Negroes working in Southern California's aircraft industry where 60,000 jobs have been created; no jobs in Seattle's great Boeing plants; Negro construction workers barred in most army cantonments; Florida Negroes barred at navy yards.

I have collected facts and figures which show that this is a national policy, condoned by the administration, unchecked by Sidney Hillman's labor division of the National Defense Advisory Commission. I have chosen Hartford, in the heart of Connecticut's new "war boom country," as the scene of an investigation into the status of the Negro in "defense." Hartford is a New England state capital. Abolition of slavery found its greatest strength in pre-Civil War New England. You might expect to find Hartford exceptional.

But first let's look at some figures. In 1938, twenty-two percent of Connecticut's white adults were unemployed and looking for work. That year twenty-eight percent of Connecticut's employable Negroes were in the same situation. One year later, Negroes were engaged for 763 jobs in low paid personal services; they constituted eighty percent of all those so employed. Conversely, better paid jobs, in trades, offices, at professions, went almost 100 percent to whites. Of 1,700 Negroes who applied for jobs as unskilled manual laborers, only 126 found employment. Seven hundred applied for production jobs—forty-seven were employed. Fifty percent of all white applicants for government service jobs were engaged—only one Negro in twelve.

Hartford's rate of deaths from tuberculosis is twenty-seven in 100,000, or one out of every 3,704 whites. The rate of Negro deaths from the same cause is one out of every 347—more than ten times as high. These figures may be repeated for many categories. The story—statistically—is always the same.

How do Hartford Negroes feel about the war? What do they think of the Jim Crow policy of Colt Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Co., and the Pratt & Whitney branch of United Aircraft Co.?

LET'S DROP IN on Lewis Sargent, Negro community leader in Hartford's North End, executive of a federation of Negro organizations active in charitable work. You find his home after a walk from Main Street, past old frame houses, tiny stores. Climb up the stairs to the second-floor flat and knock and Mrs. Sargent comes to the door. It is Sunday morning. Lewis is asleep, but he wakes and hastens to dress. As you sit in his neat, modest parlor, you see the certificate over his bookcase. He is a master of arts, a doctor of psychology and education. In a moment, the sturdy, well-built man in his mid-thirties grasps your hand warmly. "Glad you're here. I've got plenty to say." He sits forward in his wicker chair. "I'd like to begin from the beginning," he adds. And he fairly bursts with his story:

"I know you want me to talk about today. But first I want you to know something about our community. We Negroes of Hartford have a simple pride in being American citizens. We first came here as long ago as 1734. Most of us were body servants then—that's another word for 'slave,' for Connecticut had slavery before the Revolution, and even afterwards. We fought in the Revolutionary War—many of us. You can look at the headstones in the graveyards—Faithful, Loyal, Handy—those are Negro names. Lots of rich white men didn't want to fight for freedom. They sent their servants as substitutes.

"And we had intellectuals then, Lemuel Haynes, born of a white mother and a black father, who was adopted by Deacon Rose. He was a preacher in North Bloomfield, who married a white woman and went to Vermont where he became famous as an orator. His debates with Hosea Bellevue are models of eighteenth century polemics. Last year a mural was unveiled in Bennington, Vermont, to Haynes. And there was Jupiter Hammon, who lived in Hartford, and who was the first Negro poet—although many books credit Phyllis Wheatley with this honor. But Hammon wrote ten years earlier.

"We have pride in our Americanism, and in our culture. . . ." He leaned forward. "Now there's no use telling you the story of the Civil War. But our real troubles hereabouts came with the 1917 world war."

In the fields all about Hartford tobacco grows. Many of the smaller farms are privately owned, but the vaster acreages are controlled by absentee corporations. In 1917, these corporations used the war situation to import Negro labor from the South. Recruiting agents were sent to South Carolina.

"They're doing the same thing today," explained Mr. Sargent. "On the land of the American Sumatra Co., which controls thou-

sands of nearby acres, plantation customs exist. The workers live like serfs on the land, single men in barracks, families in converted pig pens, barns and shacks. They have no bathing facilities, primitive outside toilets. In the fields there's no sanitation whatever. Many work for \$1.50 a day, from dawn to nightfall.

"Last year the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing & Allied Workers of America sent an organizer up here, a young Yale graduate. He was arrested for trespassing. It's worth your life to go on that land if they don't want you. Some of the workers struck spontaneously. But the company, by pitting one group against the other in slave tradition, was able to break the strike up. Here's how they do it: The Negroes from the area around Windsorville, in South Carolina, are the poorest paid, worst treated of all. Some southern high school boys are tricked into coming North because they think they can earn enough with which to continue their schooling. Then there are the local Negro and white men and women, who are so downtrodden that they are glad to get any kind of work."

IN HARTFORD, the average Negro head of a family of four earns \$13.90 weekly. He lives in an old frame house, such as Mr. Sargent's. In theory he is equal to any white man. But not only does he suffer from economic discrimination—he is Jim Crowed socially.

"Three years ago," says Lewis Sargent, "Countee Cullen, the writer, visited Hartford with his secretary," Mr. Sargent continued. "They dropped into a downtown hotel for dinner. For forty-five minutes they sat in the dining room, until the kitchen closed. They ate in a Negro restaurant.

"Yes, a state law does prohibit discrimination. But the business houses which bar Negro workers create that wall of mistrust, ignorance, and prejudice which is no different from southern Jim Crow. Take the local schools, for instance. We have just three Negro teachers, one in a school in which forty-three percent of the pupils are black, one in a school in which some of the pupils are Negro. The third teacher is a substitute. As a result white children, growing up in Hartford, know nothing about our intellectual life.

"The utilities companies treat us in the same way. Five of our people work for the electric light company—none higher than mail clerk. No street car motormen, no conductors. We have one policeman—a supernumerary cop—and he's a bachelor of science from Howard University who is paid only when he works. Hartford is the insurance center of the nation—no Negro has a better job than porter or elevator operator in the insurance companies. The state government is the same.