

HOW THE N. A. A. C. P., A MINORITY GROUP ORGANIZATION, HAS RESISTED
COMMUNISM*

This is the manuscript, with
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I should like to first express my pleasure in being invited to participate in this forum. Free and open discussion constitutes the warp and woof of the democratic fabric. The political process, the loom, can produce a strong and enduring fabric only if the fibres used in it are sturdy, vital, and of great tensile strength. The fibres are strong when they are made of intelligent, responsible, and clear discussions; intelligent, responsible and clear discussion properly Sanforized with humility. But let me leave this looming metaphor before its warp and woof ensnare me in a tortuous net of fibrous persiflage.

Nevertheless, I should also like to Sanforize my status or position here. I am neither a spokesman nor official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, although I am more or less an inactive member. I deeply regret this last fact, but for better or worse I have, for the most part, directed my labors in other mills. So if my remarks are patterned by pronouncements of that organization, they should in no way be held responsible for my deficiency in expression or understanding.

I should like to prefix my remarks with a few observations or disclosures so that you may better objectively judge the probable influence my possible biases or perspective might have on what I have to say. Further, any time one essays to speak in public or private on a subject that has "Communists" or "Communism"

in any way a part of it, he should guard his words with care, less some self-appointed, super-patriotic guardians of the Constitution un-Americanly presume to impugn the speaker's loyalty for saying something the guardians of the American way of life might not like or agree with. Many of these conservators of our "tried and proven traditional values of freedom" and more freedom sometimes do not care so much about what you say as they do about your right to say it.

There are always going to be social problems and injustice, just as there are always going to be murderers and law violators, but this conservative judgment is no excuse for non-action or standpatism. A vital effort must always be made to correct social injustice and crime, although it is known in advance that it is very doubtful that a perfect society can be brought about on this earth. We may be earth-bound, but we need not irrevocably turn our gaze from the stars.

The problems of man will hardly be solved by self-righteous arrogance or indigation, Tolerance, though not submissiveness; patience, though not spinelessness; warmth, though not sentimentality; goodwill, though not messianism; and intelligence, though not dogmatism are the virtues to be exercised in the solution of our problems.

He who is alienated and deprived becomes sick and desperate if he sees no way of improving his lot. Revolutions and other social upheavals are born of desperate efforts to remold an intractably unjust social order. Communism is most alien to our

way of thinking because of the intransigency of its doctrines and the unscrupulousness of its methods. Orderly change is given up as a possibility only when those who thwart and impede your heartfelt aspirations deny you have any rights to any aspirations or refuse to regard you as a human being deserving of any recognition. If you brutally resist or impede the realization of my human dignity, I either become an abject sycophant or an incendiary fanatic. This is the reason Communism is a genuine threat to Latin American and other countries with large classes of underprivileged people. The "haves" have too brutally squelched the desire for land and economic reform of the "have-nots." This is the reason President Kennedy has realistically and humanely set conditions of self-reform on his Alliance for Progress Program.

The enduring value of our democracy is that it even permits radical changes, if necessary, in an orderly and sober manner. If heart felt dreams are realized too slowly, more direct and bold actions are taken. The "Sit-In" and other protest movements among colored and white young people have grown out of some impatience, so a recent time article argues, "with the slow, legalistic approach of the N. A. A. C. P." The most orderly and conservative manner of social change is the use of legal process. This is particularly the case when change takes place in court rather than in the legislature. Indeed, legislatures can enact the most radical changes; but of necessity courts operate case by case in a rather sporadic fashion, not

straying too far away at any given time from well established precedents or customs. In the area of race relations and minority problems, one may legitimately complain that the judicial process is correcting injustices too slowly; but certainly it is difficult to perceive how it is moving or could move too fast there. The N. A. A. C. P. in the main has chosen the courts as the major vehicle for delivering the Negro from his deplorable condition of second-class citizenship. Law is one of the most inherently conservative institutions there is, particularly the courts that interpret and apply it. It would be surprising, indeed, if an organization, which had chosen this most conservative of conservative institutions as its vehicle of progress, were substantially influenced by radicals or made up of law disrespecting revolutionaries. With these general remarks in mind let me turn to the subject: "How the N. A. A. C. P., a Minority Group Organization, Has Resisted Communism."

The Overstreets in their book, What We Must Know About Communism (1958), state, "A second permanent target [of Communists] has been the Negro community. It is a basic tenet of Leninism that an underprivileged minority group is ripe for revolution." (174) It is not difficult to understand this. At first blush you should think the Negro is ripe for Communism. The cruelty, brutality and inhumanity the Negro has been subjected to would certainly make a group, less committed to democracy and the

American way of life than the Negro, an easy target. It is difficult to make this clear in words. One has to be a Negro to really understand how unhappy and dissatisfied he is with second class citizenship. I shall not try to explain the Negro's plight. Artists like James Baldwin or the late Richard Wright should be read in order for you to get a clear feel of the Negro's sense of deprivation and mistreatment.

The Springfield, Illinois race riot of 1908, in which several Negroes were killed and practically all were burned out of their homes, aroused many enlightened white people to action. They set up a conference in 1909 in New York to discuss the sad and disgraceful situation of the Negro in America. The conference was called on Lincoln's birthday and the official organization of the N. A. A. C. P. was launched the next year as a result of this conference.

The purpose of the N. A. A. C. P. was and is to realize for the Negro the enjoyment of rights of citizens, justice in the courts, and equal opportunity in every economic, social, and political endeavor in the United States. These are hardly subversive objectives. Lynching was on the rampage during this period. A spate of legislation in the southern states was disenfranchising the Negro. He was discriminated against, segregated, whipped, intimidated, exploited, and his women ravished with impunity. Though these evils do not exist today to the extent they existed then, nevertheless, we know the Negro is still seeking the ballot in many parts of the South,

fair employment and educational opportunity, and thus as many of the enumerated evils have been corrected or abolished through the fearless and dedicated efforts of the N. A. A. C. P. of yesterday, today it is still waging a battle against these festering sores on the United States body politic.

However, the Communists' shots have missed the mark. To quote the Overstreets again:

The Communists claim 'overwhelming success' for their work among the Negroes. This claim is itself a maneuver: an effort to instill fear in the minds of white Americans and thus to drive deeper the wedge of anxiety and prejudice between the races. In this secondary effort they have often succeeded far better than they have in their primary effort to win the Negroes. In this primary effort, they have largely failed. (174)

Those who assert Negroes as a group and the N. A. A. C. P. as an organization are significantly infiltrated, influenced, and controlled by Communists are but mouthing Communists propaganda and lies which give aid and comfort to their nefarious methods and objectives.

The Overstreets give three reasons for the Communist failure to make a dent into Negro groups and organizations:

For one thing, the Party has all too obviously taken its commands from the Soviet Union.

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A second reason for the failure has been simply that the Party has exploited Negro problems instead of trying to solve them. (175)

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A commanding reason for failure is one which the Communists seem unable to grasp. Yet it is luminously clear: the vast majority of American Negroes not only believe in democracy but want more of it; not less.

The last thing they want, after their long effort to secure the full rights of free people, is to find themselves under a totalitarian dictatorship—even if it is called the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' (176)

Now some of you may not give the Overstreets' words much credence, although they have done much to expose the bankruptcy and danger of Communism. I should like to quote another person in the know, whom, I suspect, few of you are so incredulous that you would question his integrity and knowledge of the Communist movement in the United States. Further, much of what he has to say specifically refers to the N. A. A. C. P. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has said in his Masters of Deceit (1958):

It became obvious that the Party, despite great efforts, had failed to win over even a significant minority of Negroes. Negroes resented the Party's severe criticism of Negro clergymen who had been vigorously denouncing Communism. (228). . . American Negroes had realized that the Party was a fraud and a deception and that it was willing to betray the Negro to better serve Soviet Russia. (229)

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The Party has made vigorous efforts to infiltrate the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization in 1950 authorized its board of directors to revoke the charter of any chapter found to be Communist-controlled. (229)

The N. A. A. C. P.'s national leadership has vigorously denounced Communist attempts at infiltration. (230)

The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation then goes on to enumerate how effectively the N. A. A. C. P. has resisted Communist efforts at infiltration. On page 230 he gives one of the most effective anti-communist measures he had heard of, which concerned a N. A. A. C. P. meeting in Norfolk, Virginia.

As the N. A. A. C. P. says in its organizational literature:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is an American organization. Its philosophy, its program, and its goals derive from the nation's hallowed democratic traditions.

From the beginning, the task of the N. A. A. C. P. has been to wipe out racial discrimination and segregation. It has worked always in a legal manner, through the courts and according to federal and state laws and the United States Constitution. It has also sought the enactment of new civil rights laws and the development of a favorable climate of opinion.

The following resolution was passed at the 47th Annual N. A. A. C. P. Convention in San Francisco, California, June 26, 1956, "As in the past, the Association will employ every reasonable measure in keeping with democratic organizational principles to prevent the endorsers, the supporters and defenders of the Communist conspiracy from joining or participating in any way in the work of the N. A. A. C. P." The N. A. A. C. P. has been under constant attack by the Communist press because the N. A. A. C. P. is strongly pro-American. Communist spokesmen have made the following kind of remarks about the N. A. A. C. P.: It is "reformist" and "reactionary." "An imperialist policy, softened with meaningless mumblings of protest, is followed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its leaders." Its leaders are "bourgeois reformists." I could give many quotes from N. A. A. C. P. spokesmen which point out in bold relief that organization's commitment to the American way of democratic and legal progress. Those who try to smear the N. A. A. C. P.

with the Communist label are either cynical racists who would rather divide and destroy America rather than afford Negroes human dignity or they are innocent dupes of Communist progaganda, wishful thinking and lies.

I should like to say more, but I have probably already spoken beyond my allotted time. The ideal of our great democratic government is liberty and justice for all. Those who would use the threat of Communism as a bogey for attacking the N. A. A. C. P.'s sincere and courageous effort to realize this ideal betray the United States Constitution and way of life. One violates the second great commandment of Christ that thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself when he seeks to stir up hate and racial and social dissension by irresponsibly and cynically charging the N. A. A. C. P. with Communism. Is it really so un-American for Negroes and the N. A. A. C. P. to want the rights of citizenship, justice, and equal opportunity for Negroes?