

New Negro Alliance Members Picket Washington's Most Powerful Retail Drug Chain.

RECENTLY the New Negro Alliance of Washington, D. C., won in the United States Supreme Court a victory of far-reaching importance to the maintenance of civil rights, to the broadening of democracy, to the enlightenment of the economic and social system, and to the protection of all minorities, both racial and economic; it legally obtained for the Negro the right to picket those business establishments which refused to employ colored workers.

The decision handed down by the court freed the Alliance to continue its use of "consumer pressure" to acquire employment for Negroes. But more than that, it paved the way for action of a similar nature by groups all over the country. As a result, by-where-you-can-work movements now are being planned or prosecuted in many cities throughout the country where the Negro population is large enough, and socially intelligent enough, to support them.

In its case against the Sanitary Grocery Store of Washington, the Alliance, through its chief counsel, Belford Vance Lawson, contended, and the Court agreed, that the picketing of stores largely supported by Negroes for the purpose of obtaining jobs for colored workers constituted a "labor dispute" within the meaning of the Norris-LaGuardia Act, and that under the Act the Federal courts cannot issue injunctions restraining peaceful picketing. In accepting this point of view, the Court pointed out that the Act de-

We Win

The Right to Fight

For Jobs

By
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finer a "labor dispute" as including any controversy concerning the terms or conditions of employment, regardless of whether or not the disputants stand in the proximate relation of employer and employee. It denied that the case was out of the scope of the Act because the dispute was racial, on the grounds that the Act does not concern itself with the background or motives of the dispute. It ruled that "race discrimination by an employer may reasonably be deemed more unfair and less excusable than discrimination against workers on grounds of union affiliation."

Since the case was a labor dispute within the meaning of the Act, and since the picketing was peaceful as required in the Act, the highest court ordered the District Court to reverse the decree by which it granted an injunction restraining the Alliance from picketing the Sanitary Grocery Company. In this decision it definitely denied the older philosophy expressed in the dissenting opinion of Mr. Justice McReynolds, which would prevent social legislation from abridging the absolute freedom of individual economic action for the sake of social justice. In doing so it signalized the economic broadening-down of democracy; it took a step toward loosening the rigid economic bindings of social fascism; and it contributed to the maintenance of civil rights so important to the social order if economic justice is to be achieved by any means.

The New Negro Alliance was organized in the summer of 1933, preceding similar organizations in Philadelphia, New York, Richmond, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. At the outset it was prin-

cially interested in such general problems as obtaining civil rights, setting up racial co-operatives, securing employment for Negroes in the District of Columbia government, and securing jobs in private industry through the use of consumer pressure.

This breadth of purpose resulted to a large extent from the irritation which the younger Negro felt from the general passivity and complete lack of militancy among the organizations already existing in Washington—most of them dominated by older and well-established Negroes. To the younger generation the citizens' associations in Washington, which were the only advisory units recognized by the municipal government, seemed to be completely dormant. They were unattended by more than a few of the outstanding citizens, and suffered from addle-brained, timid leadership. The local N.A.A.C.P. at that time was a fashionable organization, completely dominated by the respectable, the well-off, and the stuffed-shirt residents of the city, and beyond this the general atmosphere of the entire Negro population appeared to be socially lethargic and completely smug. The public school teacher and the government employee—who together form the educated, the responsible, the well-to-do of Washington Negro society—had hardly been disturbed by the depression beyond the short-lived Economy Act.

To the task of bringing social consciousness to these groups and to the general Negro petty bourgeoisie, which was only gradually becoming aware of the dire economic plight of its clients, the Alliance dedicated itself. At first it attempted to be concerned with the whole problem of civil and social betterment, but as time went on it began to concentrate more and more upon the work of securing jobs for Negroes in businesses largely supported by Negro consumers.

In this work the Alliance was for a short while surprisingly successful. Before long it had many of Washington's leading school teachers, administrators, lawyers, and doctors carrying picket signs, a thing previously unheard of in "respectable," "family-conscious" Washington. Within the first half year of its operation the Alliance prosecuted a successful campaign against the local A. & P. Stores, the High Ice Cream Company, and several other establishments, securing jobs for Negro workers carrying an annual payroll of approximately \$50,000.

Early in 1934 its program met a setback. A court injunction restraining it from picketing the Kaufman Department Store, a business built and largely maintained upon Negro trade,

was issued. Later in the spring a similar injunction kept it from further picketing the High Ice Cream Stores, and in the summer the Sanitary Grocery Company (a chain like the A. and P.) obtained a third injunction.

Legally deprived of its most effective weapon, the Alliance for a time was bogged down. But the group kept up its work and through heroic efforts maintained its morale and spirit through four long years of legal fights, until its battle finally was won.

The organization, however, was far from inactive during the four years it was restrained from using the picket. It sponsored a Civil Rights Bill for the District of Columbia which has been introduced into Congress, and it made some attempt at sponsoring co-operative enterprises. The methods of education and house-to-house canvass were used to initiate boycotts as a means of procuring jobs, and employers were made to see the advertising value of hiring Negroes.

For the Alliance, and for all minority groups, both racial and economic, the decision of the Supreme Court was a substantial victory. Already the organization has recommenced its work with renewed vigor, and the rapid strides that it made in 1933-34 are again possible. The Kaufman Department Store has recently hired Negro clerks and new drives are now being prosecuted against the Peoples Drug Store Company and the Sanitary Grocery Company.

The work of the Alliance is considered especially significant because of its level-headed and careful development of the theory of consumer pressure as a minority tactic. It has gone further in completely rationalizing this technique than any other similar Negro organization of recent years. Fortunately situated in Washington, the Alliance has had the advantage of being influenced by two important forces, each of which has clarified its aims and purposes so that in its activities it has been able to avoid the blundering of rabid racial chauvinism into which so many other buy-where-you-can-work movements have fallen.

The first of these forces was the Division of Social Sciences at Howard University, and especially its Professor Abram L. Harris. The second was the recent establishment of liberally-led and socially intelligent government employee labor unions, which have at last made it clear to the Washington Negro that the white race is not all rich or prejudiced, and that economic security is the problem of the white worker and petty bourgeoisie as well as that of the Negro.

In setting up the program of the Alliance, the founders first of all took into careful consideration the many plans of action that the Negro

race heretofore has followed in its approach to a solution of its problems. As a minority group, they felt that all of these to a large degree had failed because they had missed a basic economic significance in the social position of the Negro in America.

There was, first of all, the Booker T. Washington approach, which sought to develop the Negro as a semi-skilled and skilled worker. The members of the Alliance felt that this program had come entirely too late historically, for even as Booker T. Washington and others had founded industrial schools to train the Negro, the American labor movement had been taking steps to exclude him from the craft and industrial occupations. The members of the Alliance granted that some kind of sound economic foundation for the newly-freed Negro had been necessary, and that the semi-skilled and unskilled occupations had offered the best opportunities for his economic advancement. But they maintained that such a program was, and still is, economically impossible. They saw unmistakable signs of the failure of the program in the increased emphasis on academic and professional training for Negroes, even in those institutions which were founded to carry out agricultural and industrial education.

A second approach was that proposed by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, which first gained popularity as a reaction to the less ambitious Booker T. Washington program, with its inherent limitation of the Negro to the lower type of social achievement. DuBois's idea was the development of the "better tenth" of the race. He in-

sisted that the Negro should attempt to assimilate the best of the Western and American culture, and advocated the training of at least ten percent of the race in things academic and professional. By such training, he averred, not only would the race receive through those trained the services necessary to its improvement, but at the same time white America would be afforded a demonstration of the ability of the Negro to assimilate and command even the finest of culture. This approach was at one time especially popular with the Negro petty bourgeoisie, just appearing in the Eastern seaboard cities, who were particularly interested in obtaining civil rights as their social standing improved.

An off-shoot from this approach was the theory proposed by Dr. Alain Leroy Locke, who looked forward to a peculiar and special contribution to American culture by the Negro. By this approach the Negro not only would master Western civilization, but at the same time would produce his own negroid contribution for the great stream of American culture. Dr. Locke and the followers of his philosophy believed that racial prejudice soon would disappear before the altars of truth, art, and intellectual achievement.

The members of the Alliance realized that the American Negro had long fulfilled the hopes and expectations of both these theories, for students and scholars of the Negro race not only had mastered their fields brilliantly but had contributed to their development. And yet, they realized, the white race still was not willing to accept the Negro, either as an American capable of mastering the entire civilization and culture, or as a significant contributor. Socially and economically, they knew, the Negro remained an oppressed minority.

Faced with these facts, the Alliance took the position that minority oppression is basically economic and that therefore there could hardly be a cultural remedy. It saw proof of its contention in the oppression of the Chinese people, who long before the coming of the Western powers to the Orient had a meaningful and rich culture. It decided that the essence of a minority position rests not so much upon the inability to produce culturally, but upon the capitalistic necessity of labor differentials, increased profit, and the rest that goes with economic exploitation, and it felt that it was no longer essentially desirable to stress the cultural differences of the Negro, nor his peculiar racial characteristics which are now hardly extant.

The third approach of Negro leaders to the economic problem had been the struggle for civil rights. Such a struggle, the Alliance felt,



Attorney Belford V. Lawson, Who Argued the Alliance's Picketing Case Before the U. S. Supreme Court.

could never be successful by itself. It is an old principle that the law is only that which the people will respect as such. The fate of the 18th Amendment makes this quite clear in another field; and the fate of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, together with the Civil Rights laws, proves the truth of this statement for the Negro. Driven on by economic and social factors, the great majority of Americans can hardly be expected to honor the law, so far as the Negro is concerned, simply because it is the law.

However, the Alliance did not underestimate the importance of the civil rights approach as a minority tactic. In a manner of speaking, the law, if properly influenced by the idealism of the jurist and the scholar, will often lift the community above its determining factors. Temporarily at least, the idealistic scholar and jurist can build an ideological super-structure in the law which can check-mate the anti-social forces of unbridled self-interest, profit-seeking, and racial exploitation. Much can be achieved through the civil rights approach also in pushing over old restrictions and taboos which may remain in the law long after the popular will has moved on to an enlightened position.

In fact, it was realized that the Alliance's approach could not succeed in its application of consumer pressure without a corresponding civil rights struggle as a means of protection. The Alliance merely maintained that, alone, a fight for civil rights was far from complete as a minority tactic.

The civil rights struggle was also a part of the program of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, as expressed through the N.A.A.C.P. But Dr. DuBois attacked the Alliance and similar movements because of his early distaste for anything that smacked of segregation. His contention was that such organizations accept segregation, and even hope to solidify it, by giving it an economic basis. In short, his position was that white America would more or less gladly give the Negro jobs in Negro-supported businesses in order to segregate him more adequately.

At that time Dr. DuBois still looked forward to a social life without segregation, in which full freedom of economic opportunity also would develop. His attitude has since changed.

On this point the Alliance took the position that segregation in a city like Washington is a fact and that its disappearance at any early date is hardly probable because of the lethargy of the Negro, the prejudice of the white man, the law, the pressure of real estate values, and similar socio-economic factors. Even in northern cities, where segregation theoretically does not exist, these social and economic factors bring it about.

If segregation is to exist, then, the Alliance felt that it should not be coupled with racial exploitation—the best jobs even in the Negro areas going to members of other races.

Such a situation as that which exists in Philadelphia, for instance, excited the organization's reformist zeal. In this city there is no segregation in the public school system—theoretically! No Negro teachers, however, are appointed above the graded schools, and in schools where as high as eighty percent of the student body is Negro, the teachers are all white. To have Negro teachers over white children is hardly possible with the existing racial attitudes in Philadelphia. The Alliance felt it is better to have outright segregated schools, which already exist in fact, and to procure the resulting jobs, than to feebly struggle against tremendous odds for the appointment of Negro teachers over white students. Its opinion was backed by observation of the high type of intellectual and cultural achievement that segregated schools had made possible in Washington through the stimulus provided by the availability of excellent occupational opportunities. Is it not better to have Washington's segregated schools than to continue to foster the lethargic attitude of Philadelphia's young Negroes, who seldom even go to college since the occupational opportunities available to them are so limited? If grievous psychological factors develop from segregated schools, Washington's high intellectual development shows it to be relatively a less important factor than the job opportunities afforded.

The next major approach to racial economic salvation was also Booker T. Washington's. Dr.



George H. Rycraw, Present Alliance Administrator and Vice-President of Washington's Industrial Union Council.

Washington, with characteristic feeling for the strengthening of the Negro's economic basis, was a strong advocate of building Negro business. Present-day proponents of this school, largely incipient Negro business men hoping to become capitalists, point out that the race is made up for the most part of unskilled industrial workers, agricultural workers, laborers, and professional persons. To fill in the occupational scheme, they say, it is absolutely necessary to build Negro business to provide opportunities for Negro youth. They hasten to recite the rise of many foreign-born Americans from shoe-string peddlers to department-store owners.

With this shoe-string school of thought the Alliance could not agree. History showed that the Negro was hardly emerging from slavery when American business was coming of age in the form of the modern corporation. Thus the Negro missed, or rather never had, the opportunity to get in at the start, and now, try as he will, he is unable to build anything but small businesses. Even here he faces the competition of chain methods of distribution which he has not yet found a way to overcome.

Without capital, individually or collectively, and with no business tradition, the Alliance saw the Negro as almost totally incapable of competing with highly organized and capitalized American business. It appeared from the record that Negro business was entirely incapable of surviving except in the fields of insurance and undertaking, where white corporations did not care to compete; in the first instance because the mortality rate was too high and in the second because of social prejudice. In banking, it was recognized that the Negro had made some small success, but it still seemed that in the final analysis the business ended up in the larger white banks which the Negro banks had to use for clearing, deposit, credit, and other purposes. And so the Alliance decided that it would not concern itself with attempting to aid in the erection of a Negro capitalist class. It took the attitude that only through consumers' co-operatives, which had proved capable of competing in the capitalistic system in the Scandinavian countries, Ireland, England, the West Coast of Africa, and the United States, could any business progress be made within the race.

On the positive side, the Alliance decided to concern itself with filling out the occupational structure of the race in accordance with the limiting conditions of the existing economic and social pattern. In surveying its field, it found that the Negro is occupationally all hands and feet, largely feet. He is generally either an unskilled industrial worker, a laborer, a farmer

or agricultural worker, or a professional. Comparatively few Negroes are engaged in the skilled trades or hold business or clerical positions. According to the 1930 Census, 32.2 percent of America's native white men and 67.1 percent of its native white women were employed in general clerical capacities, while only 8.5 percent of the colored men and 3.5 percent of the colored women were employed in this manner. The Alliance therefore decided that its primary aim must be to forcefully increase, by the use of consumer pressure, the number of Negroes employed in clerical capacities, business positions, and generally in the higher occupational levels.

As its chief weapon it decided upon the consumer's boycott, undoubtedly the most powerful force which the Negro has yet discovered as a minority technique, believing that since the basis for minority persecution is chiefly economic, the remedy should likewise be economic. As outstanding world examples of the efficacy of the boycott it studied the Indian boycotts and the Chinese boycott against Japan. It believed that in its case retaliatory force would not be used as it was in China's; the Negro and the Indian have the advantage of dealing with democratic countries while the Chinese face a fascist Japan which emerged from feudalism no earlier than the nineteenth century.

The Alliance saw special power in the boycott because of the nature of modern capitalism. Since the modern corporation is organized to carry on mass production on a marginal basis, it is especially vulnerable to consumer action, for in order to destroy profit it is merely necessary to destroy sales to a point where marginal profit disappears. Thus the basic aim of the organization became placement of Negroes in clerical positions in distribution units; but a secondary aim was semi-skilled, skilled, and professional placements in factories and other points of production.

In the four years that the Alliance has carried on its work, its ablest critic has been Dr. Abram Harris of Howard University. It was Dr. Harris who brought labor consciousness to the organization at a time when it was foolishly racial and chauvinistic. He pointed out that the result of such a movement as was at first visualized was inevitably and finally the antagonism of the white worker, with whom the Negro must sooner or later ally in the general evolution in America toward greater social justice. His criticism appeared at a time when the CIO first loomed on the national horizon and liberal government employee trade unions first came to Washington.

From the outset, the Alliance never asked for outright displacement of white workers, but for

employment of Negroes during the course of normal labor turnover. It soon began to become active in the new labor renaissance in governmental Washington, insisting that the Negro be organized with equal opportunity for all occupations. The CIO met the question squarely, guaranteeing that the Negro would get the same jobs as went to members of other races; although it could not, as a labor union, admit the wholesale displacement of its members. In short, it was wholly in accord with the gradual turnover idea. It organized the Negro clerical workers for whom the Alliance had secured jobs, as well as a large number of Negro government cafeteria employees. The Alliance became integrated into the general movement for social justice for all workers.

In his book, *The Negro As Capitalist*, Dr. Harris made several criticisms of buy-where-you-can-work movements. With some of these criticisms the Alliance has never agreed; with others it has felt that they do not apply in its case.

Dr. Harris objected to such movements, first of all, because he felt that economic retaliation on the part of whites employing Negroes would mean the loss of more jobs than could be gained. The Alliance disagreed with his position, feeling that it was essentially a type of defeatism. One might just as well say that Socialist and worker movements for social justice should all cease at once, for their impending success inevitably results in fascism and the complete suppression of workers as in Germany, Italy, and Spain. But the fact that this is not always the case is apparent in France, England, and the United States; it all depends upon the techniques employed and the complete historical, political, social, and economic situation.

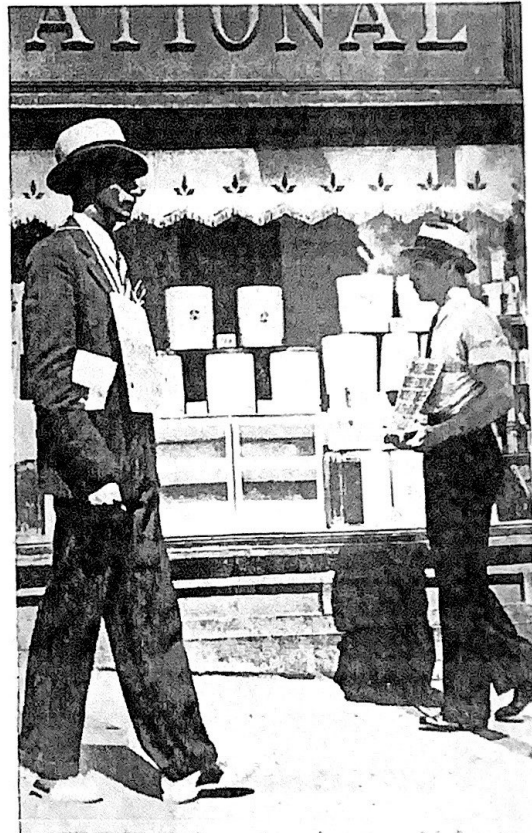
The same danger of retaliation is true of all forms of tactics where ultimate power does not reside in the hands of the agitating group. The Negro can do nothing through buy-where-you-can work movements without the sympathy of liberal elements and of labor. Rabid racialism must be avoided at all costs, and movements in Chicago and New York have been none too successful in doing this.

Dr. Harris insisted, in the second place, that buy-where-you-can-work programs must result in the absolute displacement of white workers regardless of the use of the method of placing Negroes only when normal labor turnover affords an opportunity. The Alliance felt that in taking such a stand he assumed the complete poverty of capitalism as far as any future expansion is concerned, and that he intimated that there is little rotating employment resulting from

shifts and types of production which would afford opportunity for the frictionless placement of Negroes. Through its program the Alliance has shown that, far from causing a general displacement of white workers and thereby alienating their support, the buy-where-you-can-work program can be carried out in close cooperation with even the most advanced elements of the labor movement.

Dr. Harris stated that buy-where-you-can-work programs are generally anti-Semitic because in their mere activism they strike at the neighborhood Jewish storekeeper. But the Alliance has always felt that it has been notably free of anti-Semitism. Certainly anti-Semitism has never been expressed in any of its publicity. Only one Jewish concern, the Kaufman Department Store, has ever been picketed, and then in the regular course of a city-wide campaign. Neighborhood Jewish stores which employ only members of the operator's family have never been approached.

The Alliance approach resulted from a feeling that the great modern corporation structure was a huge collective instrument with which individual members of the race could not com-



This Campaign Was Successful; the Picketed Store Hired a Colored Clerk and Promised to Employ Others.



Judge William H. Hastie, Former Alliance Administrator, Who Drafted a Civil Rights Bill for Washington.

pete. This was true for two reasons, namely, lack of capital and lack of opportunity to partake of the drive to trustification which got under way even as the Negro emerged from savagery. Consciously or unconsciously this corporation economy has afforded none of the higher occupational opportunities for Negroes. Hence the Alliance felt that the only way occupations could be secured was by a collective consumer attack. The Alliance held that when any consumer movement attacked neighborhood family businesses, it in effect denied the principle of freedom of economic enterprise, on which the very survival of the Negro depends, and substantially took a position of demanding that all black dollars go into black hands. Such a consumer movement is in essence the same as that of German Fascism, which demands racial autarchy.

The Alliance felt that all consumer movements must admit the principle of fair individual economic enterprise or suffer disastrous retaliation, for the other position basically accepted two separate economies, one white and one black, which if adopted by other races would completely crush the Negro. The aim of the Alliance was to better integrate the Negro into the economy which exists and whose corporate nature has excluded him, not further to separate black and white economy. The Alliance took the position that if Harlem Negroes were disturbed about individual Jewish businesses, the only fair and safe approach would be to establish competing Negro businesses.

Traditionally only the most intimate and best relationships have existed between the Jewish

neighborhood storekeeper and the Negro. The German persecution has given the Jew a new sympathy for the Negro, and the Negro a new understanding of the Jewish situation. The philanthropy of the Jew in Negro education has made him undoubtedly one of the outstanding and most appreciated friends of the Negro. In view of these facts, however, it is important that all buy-where-you-can-work movements mark well the fear and criticism of Dr. Harris.

Social understanding saved the Alliance from anti-Semitism. Even when there was some talk of anti-Semitism at, as Dr. Harris put it, "that greatest institution for the higher education of Negroes," the Alliance was forceful in its criticism of such an attitude. The organization, furthermore, never sought to apply any principle of racial employment to the higher education of the Negro. Such a principle would be unsound, both from considerations of endowment, excellence of faculty, and psychological balance in education. The Alliance is only concerned with insisting upon some kind of employment for the young products of the many Negro institutions of higher learning.

In general summary, Dr. Harris was apparently of the opinion that the buy-where-you-can-work movement must necessarily be in essence minority fascism. He felt that it applies a principle of racial economic self-sufficiency to a minority situation, exposes the race to the possibility of retaliation, and "becomes a spiritual ally of German Fascism." In short, he believed that a minority could hope to gain little but further persecution when it attempted to close the free interplay of the economic system by a program which is in the slightest concerned with racial self-sufficiency, or rather, racial well-being.

This argument assumed that the economy is, or was, open to the Negro and that for the Negro, social fascism does not already exist. The Alliance felt that through the effective shutting off of all opportunities, social fascism did already exist for the Negro. What can be lost by way of economic opportunities when 70 percent of the Negro population is on relief in some urban centers, and when the Negro is unfairly denied employment in the very businesses which are supported by his consumer power (or relief consumer power)? The Alliance believed that, characteristic of many capitalistic, democratic institutions, social fascism exists for the Negro; and it believed that to some extent through the exercise of the freedom, civil and economic rights guaranteed under a democratic system of government, this condition could be alleviated. It knew that labor unions had made headway against similar social fascist situations.

Comparisons are odious, and historical comparisons at present are at best highly problematical and subject to numerous qualifications. But the Alliance has always emphatically denied any essential similarity between its program and that of German Fascism, for while the latter is concerned with complete racial self-sufficiency, racial chauvinism and supremacy, the former is merely concerned with equal economic opportunities under a system which professes liberalism and enlightened economic individualism. To say that some buy-where-you-can-work groups appeal to racial chauvinism in their propaganda is beside the point. The Communist Party does the same thing in its appeal to the Negro in this country, yet it hardly looks forward to a racial chauvinistic state.

Buy-where-you-can-work movements rest, or rather should rest, entirely upon that concept of liberal democratic government which limits individual economic enterprise by principles of social justice and equal opportunity. If Dr. Harris means to imply that any deviation of a minority group in a liberal democratic system from the complete individualistic system must necessarily result in the opposite or completely collectivistic racial system, both on their part and the part of the majority race, and that there is no such thing as individualism modified by social justice, then he places himself close to the most reactionary of the theories of individualism. In fact, he finds himself in company with such conservative persons as Mr. Justice McReynolds and Mr. Justice Butler.

The former, in dissenting from the majority

opinion in the recent case won by the Alliance in the United States Supreme Court, stated, "Under the tortured meaning now attributed to the words 'labor dispute,' no employer . . . who prefers helpers of one color or class can find adequate safeguard against intolerable violations of his freedom if members of some other class, religion, race, or color demand that he give them precedence. . . . The ultimate result of the view now approved to the very people whom the petitioners claim to represent, it may be, is prefigured by the grievous plight of minorities in the land where the law has become a mere political instrument." The Alliance denies that such must be the case and believes there is a middle ground.

The Alliance, however, is not ungrateful to Dr. Harris for his criticism. It is especially thankful for his admonitions on the irrelevances of racialism, for his caution on the dangers of racial chauvinism, for his more basic analysis of the Negro's underprivileged position as that of the worker, and for his clear demonstration that the Negro must look to the new labor movement for real and lasting economic and social advancement.

However, it stands firm in its belief that it is on the right track. It intends, now that its program has been sanctioned by the nation's highest court, to carry on that program with redoubled vigor. It hopes that other groups in other cities will follow in its footsteps, profit through its victories and benefit by its mistakes. For only thus can a start be made in the tremendous task of securing for Negroes their rightful share of jobs in business and in industry.