

CLOSING THE LITTLE BLACK SCHOOL- HOUSE

SECOND NATIONAL NEGRO CONFERENCE RESULTS IN NEW ORGANIZATION

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BROOKLYN

At the second annual conference of the National Negro Committee in New York May 12-14, the subject under discussion was disfranchisement, the effect of political disability upon the Negro. The day sessions in the United Charities Building were closed to the public, while open meetings were held at Berkeley Theater and Cooper Union.

The committee stands for a full and frank discussion of conditions among Negroes in the United States. It gathered its speakers from many parts of the country, bringing together men and women of widely differing opinions upon social and economic questions, but one in their desire for justice and opportunity for the Negro race. Among its colored speakers was the novelist, Charles W.

Chesnutt of Cleveland; Dr. DuBois of Atlanta, scholar and prose poet; Kelly Miller, professor of mathematics at Howard University, one of the few speakers who enlivened his subject with humor; Rev. Reverdy Ransom, George H. White, Ida Wells-Barnett of Chicago and Mary Church Terrell of Washington.

The speakers of the white race ranged all the way from a conservative Virginian, Oscar Crosby, who closed the Saturday night meeting, to the labor champion, Clarence Darrow of Chicago. Among the educators were Superintendent Maxwell of the New York public schools, Professors Dewey and Boas of Columbia, Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard, and Horace Bumpstead, ex-

president of Atlanta University. Albert E. Pillsbury, ex-attorney general of Massachusetts, and Moorfield Storey represented the law. Rev. John Haynes Holmes of New York, made a ringing speech, and Rev. Percy Stickney Grant of the Church of the Ascension presided at the Cooper Union meeting. This evening was rich in speakers, including Congressman Bennet of New York, author of several bills to reduce southern representation, and Ray Stannard Baker. Altogether the meetings were so full of interesting presentation and discussion of Negro conditions that it was voted hereafter to have them open to all.

The conference brought out clearly a few definite facts. First among these was the accomplishment in the southern states of the complete disfranchisement of the colored man. Whether or not a few hundred Negroes are allowed to drop their votes into a ballot box, conditions show conclusively that the Negro's power as a voter is nil, that he can effect nothing in the conduct of the government; that the men in the legislatures, in the judgeships, the supervisors of education, are responsible to the white voter only. This was the first fundamental fact brought out by a study of southern state constitutions and by the testimony of colored men as to how the constitutions work.

Accepting the fact of disfranchisement, Moorfield Storey proceeded to show how it affects the Negro in the courts.

Disfranchisement enables the white voter to elect judges who share his prejudices, but leaves the colored man without the present or potential influence which public opinion properly exercises upon judicial action. The courts are made responsible, not to the whole of the community, but only to the white part of it. Every argument by which an elective judiciary is defended tells against the system which disfranchises a part of the community.

Mr. Storey went on to say that we must battle against the state of mind which, with or without disfranchisement, denies the Negro his rights. He showed how this state of mind has shown itself among those highest in authority, citing the cases of the two troops of United

States soldiers, the Fourteenth Battery of Artillery and the Twenty-fifth Infantry. Some soldiers belonging to the Fourteenth Battery, stationed at Athens, O., in 1904, attempted to break open a jail to rescue a comrade and in so doing killed one militiaman and wounded at least two others. The facts were clear. For this, one soldier was sentenced to a year in the penitentiary and another fined. In 1906 it was charged that some of the soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry fired upon the town of Brownsville, Texas. No evidence was found to fix the guilt upon any one, but these soldiers were discharged without trial though in the case of the Athens soldiers the secretary of war had declared that "no matter how guilty a man is he is entitled to be defended by counsel." The only reason, Mr. Storey believes, for the difference in treatment of the two sets of men was that the men of the Twenty-fifth Infantry were black.

But the effect of disfranchisement upon education is the phase of the question probably most interesting to readers of THE SURVEY, believing as they must that all our children should have the opportunity of training in good public schools. The situation today of the colored child in those states where the Negro is disfranchised was discussed by Dr. DuBois in a lengthy and careful paper. Among the facts for which he brought conclusive proof were the following: That while the state appropriates money for education according to the *per capita* school population, black and white, this money is distributed unequally, the white receiving a far larger share than the black. That, secondly, there is an attempt to decrease the efficiency of present Negro schools by a reduction in salaries and a lowering of the standard of the teachers. Thirdly, that all the supervisors of colored schools are white men. And, fourthly, that the method of appropriation and distribution of school funds is causing much discontent in those counties where white children predominate; since the white child in the black belt, profiting by the Negro child's presence, receives a better schooling than the white child in the white hill counties.

Dr. DuBois dwelt upon the double sys-

tem of taxation by which the Negro, deprived of nearly all the public school funds, is forced to tax himself a second time to secure decent schooling. It is as though the laboring population of a northern community were dependent upon raising money outside of their regular taxes to secure education. The only alternative for the Negro is to beg money from the North.

Touching upon the tendency to pay such low salaries as to prevent the able Negro from following public school teaching as a profession, Dr. DuBois quoted Hoke Smith, late governor of Georgia, in a speech at Hartwell to the whites. "You must stop Negro education," he said, "and to do this you must put into the schools Negro teachers who are not able to do the work. Do not offer inducements to highly trained teachers."

After many quotations from official sources, Dr. DuBois assured his hearers that the real conditions were worse than the printed reports: He said:

For instance, in Wilcox county, Ala., the report showed that there were 2,000 whites and 10,000 Negroes with fifty-five schools for the whites and forty-eight for the Negroes. This is bad enough, but consultation with three reliable citizens in whom I have the utmost confidence, and who know their county, reveals the fact that they have no knowledge of more than six schools open for colored people during the year 1909, and they declare that the public school system for Negroes in this county is practically given up. In the six schools the teachers get from sixteen to eighteen dollars a month.

The last point made by Dr. DuBois, the better schooling given the white child in the black belt than the white child in the hill counties, is one which people outside of the South know little about. Yet it is a vital issue there, and frequently agitates state legislatures. We find, for instance, such a condition as this: A black belt county spends from nineteen to thirty dollars a head in education for its children, while a white belt county must be satisfied with five or six dollars. As the white children of the black belt are largely children of fairly prosperous land-owners while the white belt children are children of the poor, the injustice becomes the more striking. But if the

white belt objects to this the black belt threatens to let the Negro vote, and to give him schools, and the white belt dislikes the alternative sufficiently to continue the present peculiar situation.

So we have, in the black belts of the South, a result of Negro disfranchisement analogous to the increased power of the white voter of the South over the white voter of the North. We have black belt legislators representing a very small constituency, and the same number of white belt legislators representing a large one; just as we have a United States congressman elected by 1,200 men in Mississippi, while a New York congressman is elected by 75,000 voters.

At its business meetings the conference adopted a plan of permanent organization. The committee was to become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, with headquarters in New York. Three forms of membership were decided upon, at one hundred dollars, ten dollars and two dollars, all carrying with them the right to vote. A committee of one hundred was chosen with an executive committee of thirty, fifteen resident in New York. On the committee of one hundred are Jane Addams, Henry Moskowitz, Paul Kennaday, Anna Garlin Spencer, Lillian D. Wald, Celia Parker Woolley, Charles Edward Russell, William English Walling, Rabbi Silberman, Dr. Stephen S. Wise, John E. Milholland, Oswald Garrison Villard, Judge Wendell P. Stafford, Prof. Edwin R. A. Seligman, Bishop Alexander Walters, William L. Bulkley, Pres. W. S. Scarborough, and others, including many who spoke at the conference meetings. The secretary of the committee is Frances Blascoer, who can be addressed at 20 Vesey street, New York. If sufficient financial support can be secured it is proposed to engage Dr. DuBois as the head of a committee of publicity and research. The enthusiasm with which this proposition was received at the Saturday night meeting speaks well for its fulfillment. The committee publishes its proceedings and has much interesting matter at its headquarters for free distribution and for sale.