Annual Conference

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ton, recipient of the Spingarn Medal in 1918, who delivered an eloquent and scholarly address on "The Negro in Literature," closing one of the most successful and stirring conferences ever held by colored people in the United States.

The Conference devoted much thought and attention to the question of the use of the vote by colored people in the United States. The Committee on Resolutions drafted, and the Conference adopted, three statements, one of them regarding the relations of the Negro to organized labor and the other two concerned with his general and political needs.

The Conference reiterated the need for colored voters to emancipate themselves from blind allegiance to any one political party and to make the best interests of the race, coupled with the best interest of the country, the deciding factors in voting, instead of appeals to mere sentiment and party labels. The Association's position was misinterpreted by interested politicians, and attempts were made to undermine its influence. These attempts failed utterly, and recognition of the Association's principle of intelligent political independence is steadily gaining ground.

The Public Statement adopted by the Conference, and Resolutions to the Conference for Progressive Political Action, then about to meet in Cleveland, Ohio, and to the American Federation of Labor, were as follows:

Public Statement of the Fifteenth Annual Conference

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 15th Annual Conference believes that the main problem before the American Negro today is the use of his vote in the approaching election.

We face the two old parties and a possible third party movement. The Republican party which has always commanded the great majority of our votes has, during the last two administrations, recognized again our right to a voice in the party councils and made effort to carry out our wishes in legislation and administration; nevertheless, although in power in all branches of the government, it has specifically failed to pass the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, to abolish segregation in the government offices at Washington, to take any action with regard to "Jim-Crow" cars in interstate travel, to withdraw our military forces from Haiti, or to make a loan to Liberia.

The Democratic party appears to us in two distinct parts. The Northern wing of the party has recognized our demand in many states and treated us there with much fairness. But this Northern wing is at the absolute mercy of the "Solid South" with its "rotten borough" system depending upon the disfranchisement of the Negro; with its segregation and "Jim-Crow" legislation, its mob law and lynching and its denial of proper education to Negro children.

Both parties are catering to the Ku Klux Klan, that secret fomenter of religious intolerance, race hate and midnight murder whose spread is the greatest proof of national decadence and the greatest menace to democracy.

It is manifestly impossible that under these circumstances the enfranchised Negroes of the United States should vote a straight ticket for either of these parties. Our voting must be primarily a matter of individual candidates for office. In order to vote effectively we must know the records of candidates. We must demand of them clear statements as to their attitude toward matters of vital interest to us.

We must remember that we are electing in this election and other elections not simply the President of the United States but members of Congress and of the state legislatures; state officials, judges, members of school boards and other local officials. We must especially keep in mind the fact that the emancipation of the Negro today is more largely a matter of state law and local ordinance than of national enactment and that the interpretation of the law by the courts and the administration of the law by officials are just as important and often far more important than its actual content.

We need, therefore, to redouble our agitation and our effort in court action and law administration and we need especially to use our ballot in order to reward our friends and to punish our enemies. We must utterly ignore party labels and vote for the men who will best serve us and our country.

The need for such determination is shown in many ways but perhaps more especially by the continued attitude of this nation toward the education of Negro children. We have as a race no adequate common school facilities and we have continually put forward by United States government, state and local school officials and the great philanthropic foundations, not only undemocratic segregation in education, but the astonishingly undemocratic doctrine that Negroes should have no voice in the education of their own children but that their schools and colleges should be dominated by their enemies. We have repeatedly asked for Federal aid for education and in answer we have a bill before Congress which is a travesty on justice and would perpetuate in local school systems these very discriminations against which we vigorously protest.

Nothing will more quickly bring the old parties to a clear realization of their obligations to us and the nation than a vigorous third party movement. Such a movement may save us from a choice between half-hearted friends and half-concealed enemies or from the necessity of voting for the same oppression under different party names. Such a movement may give the American Negro and other submerged classes a chance to vote more directly for economic emancipation from monopoly and privilege and for a fairer chance to work according to ability and share more equitably the social income.

Finally may we remind the new immigrants to the North as well as Negroes living there that the greatest significance of this migration is the increased political power of black men in America. We have at last found an effective method not only to punish the mob, the segregationist and the disfranchiser through economic boycott, but also a chance to gain for ourselves new political power in order to vote our people into freedom.

But this means nothing unless it is used with far-reaching intelligence. We must learn to vote; we must study democracy and government; we must not