

Speaker 1:

You said that Roosevelt, that the [inaud 00:00:06] situation changed long about 1939 if all the upsurge among the workers hadn't – hadn't went on [inaud 00:00:15] and developed into a political liability, and – and so, tell me what – do you see any – any – how do you think the – do you think that possibility of the repetition of that in the civil rights movement [inaud 00:00:32] civil rights and all along [inaud 00:00:35]. What do you think [inaud 00:00:39]?

Farrell Dobbs:

Well, tomorrow night after I describe the fight in 1941, I plan to terminate by dealing briefly with the labor upsurge of 1943, '46, and then coming back to take a brief, somewhat different look at the day from the point of view of the little excursion we've been making into the past here that I had hoped might show some new light on some of the factors. And in that I will try to deal briefly with the inter-relation between the civil rights movement and the labor movement, the present conjuncture not in primary terms as the civil rights movement because what we're talking about here is the struggle potential of the working class. But primarily from the point of view of the impact the civil rights movement is bound to have on the labor movement.

One of the factors I will mention in that connection will be what the – what the role of the civil rights movement will be, and I believe inevitably bringing about the breakup of the labor democratic coalition. And I believe the reason will be because there is not the room for an adaptation of long duration of the civil rights movement to the capitalist two-party system that has been the case with the labor movement. Not because there aren't some leadership problems in the civil rights movement that are broadly analogous to some of the leadership problems in the labor movement today, but for other reasons.

Today as is being very richly demonstrated right now at the democratic party convention, it is crystal clear that a very significant sector of the leadership in the civil rights movement composed in part of the more conservative leaders who as a matter of fact in their own way are as afraid of the mass actions that the Negro people are developing today as the bureaucrats are of mass action by the workers and want to keep the thing tied to the present political structure. And what they really want in – in my estimation is something substantial right here and now for the talented tenth and promises that can be a little bit more deliberate in their fulfillment for the mass of the Negro people. And know then leaders that cannot be defined as conservative in this sense, but who yet feel they must adapt themselves to the two-party political structure of the capitalist system because their own development hasn't reached the point of consciousness where they recognize the vital necessity of independent political action by the civil rights movement.

Because there are, as yet, no vehicles at hand, because in a sense the civil rights movement is for the moment in the stage you might say, in this sense, is somewhat akin to what the problem was of bringing the atomized working class of the '30s first to the level of union organization before would be prepared to pass on the political organization, in the sense that although there were existing organizations, the NAACP and the Core and others, that what is happening is that new formations are coming into being. Manifesting a need to forge new broad mass interims of struggle even just at the level of mass action: demonstrations, picketings, sit ins, and so on. That flow from that qualitative difference that the civil rights struggle at its present stage of development is breaking through not only the concepts of tokenism and gradualism and demanding freedom now, but is breaking through the concept of the masses being a cheering section for the white liberals in the – in the two parties of the capitalist system.

And other so-called friends of the civil rights movement who always got a reason why you can't do very much right now and really want to trick and entrap the Negro people back into the old pattern of tokenism and gradualism. Why, consider for instance, I happen to find a copy of *New York Times* this morning, it carries just a little bit more news than your papers. And I noticed one story there, a reporter's describing one of the white liberals at the convention lecturing the candidates of the freedom democratic party from Mississippi that their hurting the cause by barging in and sitting in the streets of the reserve for the white cracker delegation from Mississippi refusing to take them. That this hurt the cause.

You begin to wonder how stupid can you get. What kind of a friend is that? That kind of friend, you know, the Negro people don't need any enemies. In this kind of a situation the – the militants are not yet to a point objectively in any substantial numbers where they see clearly the need for independent political action. To manifest it in another sense, in the experience of the Freedom Now party up to now. That – that declaration issued under the initiative of William Worthy of the Afro-American and others at the time of the march on Washington calling for the Freedom Now party, was a magnificent document that told very fundamental political truths. But it hasn't yet got too broad a response throughout the civil rights movement.

The – the main forms of manifestation, as I believe you're all generally aware, is the development of the Freedom Now party in Michigan where they're running a slate in the local elections and the – and the running of a candidate for state senate in New York from Harlem by the Freedom Now party chapter there. But beyond that, the – the whole pattern at this stage is to go along with the idea of support to the democratic party and playing facts and politics in democratic party. Now in that sense, you could say there remains a direct equation between the general run of the leadership of the civil rights movement and the general run of the officialdom of the union movement in practicing democratic party politics.

And I would add that among the conservative strata of the Negro leaders, there's no doubt a desire to keep it that way just as much as the union bureaucrats would like. Now one of the reasons that the union bureaucrats have been able to keep things that way is that the artificial prosperity of a war economy, a little two bit concession here and there alongside of 75 cents worth of concessions being taken back by the bosses with the – with the treachery of the union officialdom, the imposing of ever harsher anti-labor laws that increased government regimentation of the unions and give – and give hand to the union bureaucrats, it has been possible to contain the rank and file of the labor movement within this situation. Tomorrow night I'll speak a little about some of the factors I believe are operating that are going to change that.

But this possibility is not present in the case of the civil rights struggle. The concessions, or shall I say mollifications, of the working class can – can be maintained so long as a worker finds it possible to get by, feels he's going to hold his own, maybe sometime things will get a little better and he can do something before they tend to radicalize. And some more blows are going to have to be struck at the workers and as I'll try to show tomorrow night, they're going to be struck, that will feed this process. But in the case of the Negro people the fight is for freedom now. For full, complete, unqualified, social, political and economic equality right here and now, no questions asked, no holds barred, not tomorrow, today.

To give that, the capitalist class must give away one of the most vital instruments it's got in keeping the working class separated. And herein as I observed just in passing in my opening remarks the first night is one of the great treacheries of the union bureaucracy today, that they're permitting the white supremacists to split the working class. The capitalists can't do that. That's the – that's the key significance in my opinion of Goldwater-ism. Goldwater-ism is before everything else racism. A play on prejudice against Negroes, among whites, and it's making a bed for a labor vote among other things in the process.

Capitalism can't grant the demands of the Negro people. So the alternatives are either the Negro people would have to fall back and say, "Well we'll take it on the slow bell for another 100 years," or they're going to have to break with the capitalist political structure. Now if I may – may use a syllogism, since I don't think they're about to agree to another 100 years of tokenism and gradualism, as the Greeks would say, ergo, they're on the way to a break with the capitalists two-party system. I think that's the difference.

There is not the [layman's? 00:12:07] round, in other words, right here and now today with respect to the civil rights struggle. To live within the capitalist two party system that remains with respect to the White working class.

Speaker 3: Well, do you – do you think it's possible that there'll be a time that the civil rights movement and the labor movement will come together as one working body? If so, do you think that will be a long time off [inaud? 00:12:37]?

Farrell Dobbs:

Well, here again – here again we're – we're touching on a point that I plan to deal with tomorrow night. And there's one more objective fact about the history of the working class that I want to get into the record of the discussion before we come to this assessment. And that is what was demonstrated by the 1943, 1946, labor upsurge. But for now I will say yes, I think it is – it is inevitable that the Negro struggle will play a big role in radicalizing the working class as a whole. I think it is inevitable that in a radicalized working class the Negro workers will play a key role because the Negro worker today, and now when I speak of Negro worker I speak of it in a dual sense of Negro workers and labor movement in the fact that the overwhelming majority if the Negro people are of the working class.

In – in today, the Negro worker in the civil rights struggle is getting some education in a different setting in the concepts of mass action; the strategic and tactical problems of mass action; the deep political lessons that are – that are driven home by mass action when you're up – when you're up against the ruling class. Which is a ruling class is in addition to being a White ruling class is also a ruling class vis-à-vis the Negro people just as much as it's a ruling class vis-à-vis the working class as a whole.

And the key to this, I think, and this is the main thing I want to touch briefly on tomorrow night, is the effect that the dual rule of the Negro will be. The dual rule in the sense he is part of an embattled people waging a civil rights struggle for freedom and equality here and now, and as a part of the working class who is carrying that struggle right into the union movement as a part of the civil rights battle. And in the course of it, beginning to fight already a fight for a lot of White workers that unfortunately, primarily due to the bureaucrats, not too many White workers are yet aware of.

Tomorrow night I want to – I want to touch on that side of the thing. But as I say before I go all the way into it as far as time permits, I want to get in one final piece of evidence about the revolutionary potential of the American working class in terms of the 1943, '46 upsurge.

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