

John P. Davis Airs Views On The “New Deal” Declares NRA And AAA Has Not Aided The Negro Worker

[TRANSCRIPTION]

Speaker Cites AAA Acreage Reduction Plan And NRA Codes As Harmful To Race

Oklahoma City, Okla.

The two most elaborate and powerful pieces of New Deal machinery, the AAA and the NRA, have not improved the lot of Negro workers, and, indeed, have left some of them worse off than they were before, it was declared here last week by John P. Davis of Washington, in an address before the 25th annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Mr. Davis, secretary of the Joint Committee on National Recovery, composed of representatives of twenty-two national Negro and interracial organizations, said his committee had submitted briefs and oral arguments in behalf of the Negro workers in more than 60 NRA codes of fair competition.

He declared the AAA, created by the Roosevelt administration to ease the credit burden of the farmers and raise farm prices, had left the Negro farmers, to the mercies of “the very men who heretofore had charged them exorbitant interest, and who held the mortgage on their fertile farm lands.”

The Negro farmers with credit problems were directed to these local functionaries, the speaker declared, “with the hope that they would forego their lucrative exploitation and aid them in occurring easy credit from the federal government. Justice was too much to expect in such a condition as this.

Negro Has Lost 300,000 Acres

“When it is realized that the Negro owned two and one-half million acres of land loss in 1930 than 1920, and that from 1930 until the end of 1933 they had lost approximately 800,000 additional acres of land, it will be plain that the failure of the credit machinery created by the Roosevelt regime to stem these land losses was a calamity to Negro farmers. The result has been that more

and more of the Negro farm owning population has been forced into the debased position of the farm tenant and sharecropper.”

Contracts between the landlord and the government in the cotton acreage reduction program failed to protect the equities of the tenants and sharecroppers, the speaker said, and “made it an easy matter for the cotton producer to defraud his tenants and the latter was quick to avail himself of this federal gratuity.”

Jokers in Contracts

The “jokers” in these agreements, Mr. Davis said, were the permission given the landlord to sign it for himself and his tenants and to receive checks payable to himself upon waiver by the tenants; and the permission given displaced tenants to use garden land and houses free- only so long as the landlord agreed that tenants “did not conduct themselves so as to become a nuisance or menace to the welfare of the landlord.”

“Although the landlord was [receive]ing both the government rental and a better price for his cotton, the wages of casual farm labor engaged in cotton culture remained at the same low level they had been at the nadir of the depression, “ the speaker asserted.

Hits NRA Differential Wage Scales

Passing to the NRA, Mr. Davis said 1,300,000 unorganized Negro industrial workers had looked in vain for aid from the recovery machinery. He cited the cotton textile code, the first to be adopted as expressly omitting from its maximum hours and minimum wage provisions more than 12,000 Negro workers employed in the industry as outside crews and cleaners.

The speaker scored the geographical wage differentials which he said was a device used in more than 100 codes in industries employing 50,000 Negroes. He said the code of the laundry trade contained six different wages rates based upon geography, with the lowest of these- 14 cents an hour- in states where the labor is predominantly Negro.

Ridiculing the contention that geographical differences were based upon differentials were based upon differences in costs of living, the speaker

declared Delaware [to be] classified as a northern state in 449 codes with the northern wage rate, but in the fertilizer code, where most of the employees are Negro is classified as a southern state.

A hope for improving the conditions of all workers, and especially of those in the South lies in the realization by both black and white laborers that, even with the slight preference given the whites at present, they are both in practically the same condition. He suggested they disregard traditional race lines and prejudices and unite more and more on common issues to improve their lot.

Source: "John P. Davis Airs Views on the 'New Deal'," *Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas), July 6, 1934