

Ben Davis: Symbol of New York People's Unity

by Claudia Jones

A NEGRO mother wished her blessing on Councilman Ben Davis a few weeks ago when she called at his office. Her soldier son had been freed after 60 days under false arrest in Columbus, Ohio. She had come to thank Ben for his intercession with the Red Cross, Army officials and Columbus authorities, together with other leaders of the community. And another rung was wrought out in the battle for equality for our Negro servicemen in the armed forces.

A few months earlier, several Negro firemen called on the Councilman. They called to thank Ben for his almost single-handed efforts and success in ending the practice of the Fire Department of having special Jimcrow beds for Negro firemen. This fight resulted in the promotion—the first in 25 years—of two firemen who testified to the veracity of such a practice.

Many other "firsts" can be attributed to the presence of Councilman Ben Davis in the City Council; such as the unanimous adoption of his resolution demanding an end to Jimcrow in big league baseball; the indignant and unanimous resolution of the Council castigating Bilbo and Bilboism as an insult, not only to the Negro people, but to the entire citizenry of New York and the nation; his significant voice and vote in increasing the city budget which resulted in the long over-due wage increase to city employees.

With such "firsts" it is difficult to imagine New York's City Council without Ben Davis. It is a City Council today that is more attuned to the needs of the people and to the times we live in.

But it is precisely of this that the Dewey-Liberal reactionary Social-Democratic coalition wish to rob the people of New York. Bedecked in sheep's clothing, they cry to the four winds that their aim is "solely" to defeat Ben Davis "the Communist," and to assure "adequate" Negro representation in the City Council.

DOES the fact that Davis may not be re-elected disturb these self-proclaimed "champions of the Negro people" one whit? Of course not! It matters little to them whether or not there is any Negro representation in the City Council of New York. As the "best qualified, representative" of the Negro people, in the words of the influential Negro newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, and, as a Communist, whose very name symbolizes an uncompromising fight for complete equality of the Negro people, the reactionaries are finding it difficult to toss around the double-edged sword that Davis represents. Hence, their task is divided. On the one hand—give begrudging credit to his record. (What else can even they do?) On the other: confuse the issues of his reelection through red-baiting.

But this still does not fully expose their real aim. It is to foist "white supremacy" on one of the most important legislative councils of the land; it is this that they hope to achieve by robbing the people of New York



of what the New York CIO Council termed when it endorsed Davis as being: "above all—the symbol of the unity between the Negro people and the people of all races" as well as an ardent and zealous fighter in the interests of labor. This is the chief significance of their summary entering of three other Negro candidates in the field, who have no possible chance of election. It is their hope by splitting the Negro vote and confusing the issue on red-baiting lines to eliminate Negro representation, and therefore give unbridled reign to the Bilboic attacks against Negroes, Jews, Italians and other minorities.

Failure of labor, the progressive white citizenry and the Negro people to recognize this cardinal truth could only result in a go-signal for the "white supremacy" forces of the nation!

IS IT too early to speak of Davis' reelection in such terms? On the contrary. Historically, in our country, the resurgence of reaction has come in the form of "white supremacy." It was true during the close of the Civil War, when the Black Hundreds instituted a reign of terror which all but wiped out the Negro people's gains following a war to unite the nation and to free it from chattel slavery. In the anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, pro-fascist slanders against America's minorities by the Bilbos and Eastlands, this same drive is evidenced today, particularly against the heroic and dauntless sons and veterans of the Negro people.

Davis represents the challenge to "white supremacy." He represents the challenge to all pro-fascists and reactionaries, and the struggle to reelect him might well be compared to the fight of the immortal hero of Howard Fast's *Freedom Road*, Gideon Jackson. As true as was Gideon's fight to stop the reactionaries of that day, so is Ben's reelection the stop-gap to the reactionary coalition who would run riot over the people's gains of the last decade!

Although there is this similarity, there are also key differences. Chief of these is the recognition that it is possible—nay necessary—to reelect Davis in this crucial period in which the full results of our victory, security and peace, and America's role and future history is being shaped.

Therefore, it might be stated, that Davis' reelection is the No. 1 national example of labor and the peoples' responsibility to maintain and extend the democratic wartime gains of the Negro people. If it is an example, then it is also a challenge. For in the deepest sense, maintenance and extension of these gains represent the essence of the nation's unity; the fruits of our hard-won victory, future peace and security.

IT IS this that underlies the widespread national response to his reelection by the Negro people themselves. Inherent in the response is not only that the Negro people desire that New York's City Council should not be without a Negro Councilman; it is that the Negro people are demanding that the

times we live in make it necessary for their representative to be a spokesman for their interests, particularly against racial discrimination and pro-fascist "white supremacy" ideologies and practices; as well as a spokesman for the interests of labor, the progressive white citizens and their organizations.

There are manifold lessons to be drawn from this development. One is that the Negro people are evidencing their deep political maturity and are serving notice to reaction that they will not be split on nationalistic or divisive-baiting lines. (The sanguine observation of the *Chicago Defender* editorial should be voiced for all who have ears to hear—namely that Negroes recognize "that red-baiting is akin to Negro-baiting.") Second is that such recognition is based on their experiences in their struggle for equality in the last decade.

The key aspect of this struggle was that labor and a significant section of white Americans played an outstanding role in supporting the demands of the Negro people—demands which they are learning more and more is in their own fundamental self-interest!

This solidarity will have no greater test than in the coming councilmanic campaign around the reelection of Ben Davis.

As a fighter for Negro-white unity, as a champion of the interests of labor and all the people, Davis represents the symbol of the people's unity and their strength in the coming elections.

IT IS this fundamental understanding that has led the Communist Party to attach signal importance to the reelection of Davis in Manhattan, and to marshal all its forces for an all-out campaign to assure his reelection. For it is based on the recognition that Communists are the staunchest and uncompromising fighters for the rights of the Negro people, for the alliance of labor and the Negro people, against the fomenters of "white supremacy" and fascist reaction, and for achieving the complete fulfillment of the people's victory over Nazi-Japanese fascist militarism.

To consider Davis' reelection in these basic terms, therefore, is to recognize that this understanding must be brought to the Negro and white voters of New York, to make them grasp the deep significance of the oft-used phrase: that Davis is not only a fighter for the Negro people but of labor and the progressive white citizenry as a whole.

There is reason to feel confident that deepening of the understanding of the voters as to the issues involved, the Davis record and the symbol that his reelection represents, can be the best weapon that we can and must use to defeat the splitters in the Dewey-Liberal-Social-Democratic reactionary coalition who hope to rob the people of New York of the champion fighter and unity symbol in city government in the nation.

The people—Negro and white—did it before. They can do it again, under new conditions, with a recognition that it's an all-out fight; for our city's future and therefore, that of the nation!