



Half the World

by Claudia Jones

TWO WEEKS AGO, together with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, I participated in a meeting of Harlem Women Communists. As the meeting, called to discuss the special role of women for peace, got underway, two distinct impressions emerged. One, that in this major Negro community, our Party women are by no means isolated from the people, they are a part of the problems that concern the people; and, two, that we have no poverty of women cadres here, either.

In a lively discussion, which ranged from the need to bring confidence to the people that the struggle for peace be won, to the necessity of answering prevalent arguments spread by the Negro misleaders that "war will bring jobs," the women themselves came up with the answers.

Money for war preparations (\$20,000,000 for one atombomb) could build 10 James Weldon Johnson housing projects in the Harlem community, which has only one, despite the high incident of rat-infested firetraps. This, in itself, could bring jobs to the long list of unemployed Negro men and women in Harlem!

Particularly emphasizing the necessity to counter the arguments of the Negro misleaders, Frances Bodkin assailed H. Philip Randolph. "Randolph wants Negro men to go into war, even in a jimcrow army, because he supports the aims of the cold war." Referring to the demagogy of the Truman Administration in the Negro press that "discrimination is to be eliminated in the armed forces," she said: "If we want an example of administration sincerity, just remember the Memorial Day celebration on the S. S. Saigon. Negro soldiers were jimcrowed and got hot dogs and beer, but white soldiers got champagne and hostesses."

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THEN THERE WAS the passionate appeal of May Williams, Negro woman Communist, active in many civic, fraternal and church groups. Her voice rang clear in the meeting headquarters as she concurred with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and my own emphasis—that in this tremendous peace campaign to outlaw atomic weapons, and to brand the first user of atomic bombs as a war criminal, a war aggressor—a distinct women's peace movement must emerge.

"We must go to the housewives, but also we must reach the Negro women in their clubs, their churches, in the beauty shops, to let them know that, to have peace, they must act for it. It is our special responsibility as women to put pressure on Truman, O'Dwyer and others who want to lead us to war while they betray civil rights."

May Williams urged also that we reach Negro domestic workers who are "in other people's homes, and who are not housewives, but are the most exploited working women."

The emphasis on the building of women's peace committees was an implementation of the Party's National Committee Peace Plan. This plan states under the heading: "The Women's Movement—A Vanguard in the Fight to Save the American Family From War—that all leading Party Committees must work out special plans for the full involvement of existing women's peace committees, for reaching the women's organizations, for organizing hundreds of grassroots women's movements. Working women must get special attention. Each branch must allocate its women forces for special concentration in this field." (National Party Peace Plan, National Committee, C. P.)

Still another high point of the meeting was the talk by a Negro nursery school teacher who emphasized how her school got a graphic lesson on the closeness of war. "Until a child in our school," she said "threatened in a temper tantrum to drop an atombomb on a bus conductor, we in the school thought our security was unimpaired. We found we had no answer to give to our children. What could we tell them when atomic war hangs over us? The only answer we had—we acted on. We sent a wire to Truman urging him to outlaw atomic warfare and not to build the H-bomb."

The meeting ended with an announcement that in the Harlem community a newly formed broad Provisional Committee for Peace and Freedom had been formed. A women's Division of this Peace Committee co-chaired by Mrs. Amy Mallard and Mrs. Eulalie Menafee of the Southern Baptist Church had set itself a goal of securing 10,000 signatures to the World Peace Appeal in the next six weeks. Personal pledges by the women were then merged with pledges of support to the committee and for the establishment of 10 women's peace committees.