
**To General Secretary of the ECCI Vasil Kolarov
from Claude McKay in Moscow,
Dec. 23, 1922.**

(A document from the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 93, l. 92-93.)

Bolshoi Paris-Room 12
Dec. 23 — 22

Dear Com. Kolaroff:

Comrade Billings [*Otto Huiswood*] has just informed me that the Comintern intends giving a subsidy to start a propaganda Negro paper in America. As I am also a representative of the African Blood Brotherhood, and as I am in touch with all the Negroes in New York who would be interested in the plan, I should like to offer an opinion.

Personally I think it would be a mistake to subsidize a paper just now before the American situation is cleared up somewhat. Although it may not appear

so on the surface, the future of the Negro movement in America depends much on the outcome of struggle in the American Party. There is a group of us in New York that is convinced that the pushing of propaganda work among Negroes within the next few years depends on our concentrating on open work, and having an open Party, so long as there is room and energy to fight for a legal standing in the Northern states. Billings and [*Cyril V.*] Briggs (the comrade he proposes as editor of the paper) are not of this group even though we are all a unit on the purely Negro problem.

Furthermore, as I have told Billings, Briggs is not a capable editor. His writings are weak and do not compare nor compete with the very able stuff that is being written by the socialist Negro editor of *The Mes-*



Claude McKay and Max Eastman in Moscow, February 1923.

Photo from R.M. Whitney: *Reds in America*. (New York: The Beckwith Press, 1924), pg. 190.

senger; the nationalist Negro editor of *The Negro World*; and the radical-liberal Negro editor of *The Crisis*!

The truth is, as I said in a report that I handed in to Comrade Katayama, the group of young men that is qualified to edit a militant paper in New York for the Negro proletariat of America is just now outside of the Communist Party. They are out because of the factional feuds and underground tactics which they could not comprehend. But they are Communists in spirit who left the Socialist Party because it had turned yellow. To justify my contention I have a file of *The Emancipator* — the paper that these young men published in 1920 — that I could lend for your scrutiny. It was the only paper of its kind that put Garvey's "Back to Africa Movement" on the defensive and caused the American Government to sit up and take notice. Comrade Billings says that the editor would not care to take up the job again, but I spoke to him just before leaving America and feel sure he would, under the proper arrangements. Besides I think he would yield to the opinion of our group.

At any rate I do not think that Briggs is the man to edit such a paper as is contemplated. Comrade Billings has some copies of Briggs' defunct magazine, *The Crusader*, here. And if you should ask for them and compare them with the petty bourgeois *Crisis*, the Socialist *Messenger*, and *The Emancipator* which I have with me, you will see what I mean. *The Crusader* was always more of a Negro family journal.

My suggestion is that the matter of a subsidy should be postponed until the Conference is arranged. The *Emancipator* group would perhaps be invited here and the Executive Committee could judge for itself the calibre of the various men. It would do the Negro movement no good in America, but infinite harm, if you made a mistake and backed the wrong horse at this juncture.

The CP in America made the same mistake. On my return to the USA after a year's work with the English comrades, I put both the CPs in touch with the *Emancipator* group — they were quit willing to start afresh with their paper, which had recently gone under. But the CP was more interested in Briggs (to whom I also introduced them) because he had a magazine. And yet it had been pointed out to them which was the better and more influential group. And a fact that cannot be accounted for is that *The Crusader* died a few months after its editor joined the party.

I am also writing to Comrade Katayama on the subject. It would do infinite hurt to our movement if by a hasty decision you brought about the kind of dissensions in our midst that have demoralized the American Party.

Yours fraternally,

Claude McKay

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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