

AFL and the Poll Tax

By Doxey Wilkerson

IF Philip Pearl's evasive and confusing article on the anti-poll tax bill (AFL newsletter, April 18), reflects, as is customary, the Hutcheson-Woll point of view, then AFL progressives had better act quickly to prevent new legislative sabotage by the dominant leadership of their Executive Council.



Although admitting that "the Negro question in America is rapidly approaching a point where critical decisions must be made," and recognizing that the coming Senate debate on the anti-poll tax bill is now the focal point of the struggle, Pearl assumes an attitude of detached neutrality, declaring "It is not our purpose here to pass sweeping judgments one way or another."

Although he anticipates "filibusters and denunciations and insults" in the fight to bring the bill to a vote in the Senate, this calm and serene spokesman of Hutcheson and Woll resists what he calls the "temptation to condemn," because "It is not very intelligent nor helpful."

Whereas all the world knows that the poll tax laws disfranchise more millions of white than Negro citizens, hinder the growth of a vigorous labor movement in the South, and strengthen the deadly coalition of reactionaries and defeatists who

now threaten to disrupt the war effort of the whole nation, Pearl has the insolence to write as if the poll tax involves just another of those anti-Negro discriminations of which "practically every white citizen of America is guilty."

When the crying need of the nation is to mobilize the full power of organized labor and all other patriotic groups for vigorous struggle to pass the anti-poll tax bill and thus unleash the democratic win-the-war power of 10,000,000 disfranchised Americans, this AFL journalist spreads defeatism and confusion by predicting a "disastrous failure" for "any attempt to wipe out discrimination by force or edict or even legislation."

Rather than call for political action to hasten victory and the democratic goals for which we fight, Pearl asks merely for a "process of education" which "may appear slow to white reformers and rebellious Negroes" (my emphasis!), but which, nevertheless, "is the only way to attain progress."

To top it all, asserting that "in order to find a solution for the Negro problem we must first try to understand it," "Professor" Pearl proceeds to dish out a weird assortment of political illiteracy in alleged "explanation."

"People are prejudiced," Pearl says, "because they feel a secret sense of guilt" for their unjust treatment of the Negro. He appears ignorant of the fact that anti-Negro prejudices are deliberately fostered and institutionalized by such forces as the poll taxers and the interests

they represent to exploit the white and Negro masses and to entrench political reaction.

Journalist-educator Pearl "explains," further, that "the very degrading conditions which the white man's civilization has forced upon the Negro constitute the chief reason for his being held in low esteem." But even he should know that the whole rotten system of Jim crowism, the poll tax and other forms of disfranchisement, and the fascist-like ideology of "white supremacy" are reactionary techniques consciously created and aggressively maintained just to produce the "degrading conditions" of which he speaks.

Pearl's article would be very disturbing if it reflected ignorance alone. The AFL, for which he writes, now has urgent need truly to understand the Negro question and the great stakes of labor and the nation in its progressive solution.

Even more serious, however, is the possibility that Pearl's article is deliberately confusing and that its purpose is to lay down an ideological smoke-screen behind which his Hutcheson-Woll mentors may knife the anti-poll tax bill as they have so many other progressive legislative measures.

Let AFL progressives be on the alert to uphold and carry forward their Union's historic fight against the poll tax. Let there be no behind-the-scenes "deal" to immobilize the AFL forces from effective participation in a struggle so vital to organized labor and our embattled nation.