by Marquis Childs

Conference Of Progressives

ON JANUARY 4 a group of progressives will meet here in Washington in an effort to shape a program on which it is hoped eventually that millions of Americans can agree. In many ways this meeting is likely to have an importance beyond the treatment it will receive in the news.

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In the first place, the effort is not to make headlines. The day-long meeting will be off the record, with the conclusions announced to the press at the end of the session.

One reason why this meeting has special significance is that perhaps for the first time for such a gathering a deliberate and careful effort has been made to exclude Communists. It is being held under the auspices of the Union for Democratic Action, of which Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, professor of applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary, is the head.

Dr. Niebuhr, a forceful and militant progressive, has persistently resisted the attempts of Communists and fellow travelers to make every democratic movement merely another part of the tail on the Communist kite. More often than not, the Communists have succeeded by their ruthless tactics merely to disrupt the organizations they attempt to take over.

WHILE THEY will attend as individuals rather than as representatives of their organizations, several of the labor leaders who will participate are those who have long worked to rid the unions of Communist fellow-traveler intrigue. They have seen the disastrous effect of this intriguing that has helped to divide the labor movement and to make individual unions serve the end of Russian foreign policy rather than true trade unionism. Among the union officials who will participate are Allan S. Haywood, George Baldanzi and James B. Carey of the CIO, and David Dubinsky and Boris Shishkin of the AFL.

One of the prominent participants will be Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt has had her own searing experiences with the Communists. But these experiences have only strengthened her belief in a progressivism based on the fundamental human freedoms. Out of deep conviction, this remarkable woman stood up to the Russian delegates at the recent United Nations sessions in defense of the rights of displaced persons. Again and again with moving eloquence she defended those rights.

Among the office-holders and former office-holders who will attend is Minneapolis' Mayor Hubert Humphrey. Still in his early thirties, Mr. Humphrey has won a wide reputation for his leadership of Progressive forces in Minnesota.

Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas will be present, along with two defeated progressives, Jerry Voorhis of California and Mrs. Chase Going Woodhouse of Connecticut. One of the few officials in the Truman Administration invited to participate is Undersecretary of Interior Oscar Chapman, who has repeatedly proved his belief in the Democratic ideal.

Besides these well-known figures, there will be others not ordinarily associated with political movements. Bishop William Scarlett of the Episcopal Church in Missouri will come from St. Louis to take part in the meeting. So will Edward Murrow of the Columbia Broadcasting System and Harry Schacter, Louisville, Ky., department store director.

THE COMMON denominator will be the desire to unite on a progressive program that can gain the widest possible support throughout the country. This program will cover social reform, race relations and all the vexatious problems bound to arise in coming years.

A declaration of common purpose will be particularly important in the light of the witch hunting and Red baiting that Congress may indulge in. If the Republicans allow the Rankin-Ernie Adamson mentality to prevail, then everyone who ever has worked for a progressive cause will be smeared with the Red label.

That is one reason why the sponsors of the coming meeting are so careful to keep out those with Communist affiliations. They want it to be unmistakably clear that this is a progressive democratic group with no concealed motives. It is interesting that the Communist left should show sufficient resentment to try to persuade some of the participants not to attend.

The January 4 meeting may not shake the world. But the conscientious men and women who sit down together hope to agree on a platform that will correspond to the desires and aspirations of millions of Americans.

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