

Under the Yoke of Imperialism

Hands off Liberia!

By GEORGE PADMORE.

Capitalist Rivalry for Colonies.

All of the capitalist countries of Europe and America, as well as the colonial and semi-colonial countries are in the greatest economic crisis which the world has ever experienced. This is causing untold hardship and misery for the working class and peasantry. Over 40 millions workers are unable to find jobs, while hundreds of millions of peasant toilers of all races and colours, are faced with starvation and hunger.

In the face of all of this deprivation and hardship, the capitalists have refused to give any relief to the unemployed workers, but instead, are cutting down the wages of those who are fortunate enough to still have jobs, while at the same time the working hours are being increased. Furthermore, the workers are being made to work faster and faster in the mines and factories as well as on the plantations. This is known as the policy of capitalist rationalisation and enables the exploiters to maintain their great profits.

Not satisfied with this, these same capitalist robbers, especially the powerful imperialist nations like United States, France, England and Japan are competing with each other for the purpose of getting new territories as sources for raw materials and markets where they can dump their manufactured goods.

This rivalry is leading to new imperialist wars. While at the same time all of the capitalist nations are plotting intervention against Soviet Russia, the only country ruled over by a workers' government. Already Japan has started to make war against China and is provoking the Soviet Union into war by sending troops into Manchuria, territory next to the workers' republic.

America is also one of the foremost nations struggling to obtain new colonies. This rivalry is daily becoming sharper and sharper between the United States, England, France and Japan.

The Firestone Dictatorship in Liberia.

During the latter part of the last century, when Africa was divided up among the European nations, America was not so much interested in this continent. America found her colonial expansion in the Pacific where she stole the Philippine Islands, and in the Caribbees, where she annexed Porto Rico and established a protectorate over Cuba and the Latin-American countries through the Monroe Doctrine. But since the last imperialist war, the American capitalists have become very much interested in Africa. Why? The automobile manufacturers found themselves confronted with the necessity of securing large supplies of rubber for the manufacture of motorcar tires. Until this time England was the greatest producer of rubber which was secured in Malay and Java in the East. This gave the British capitalists a monopoly over this indispensable commodity, and enabled them to dictate prices to the American manufacturers. This economic dependence upon the British did not suit the American imperialists, so that they began to look around to find some country in which they could secure their own source of raw

rubber and become independent of their British rivals. This hunt for a rubber base marked the beginning of Liberia's enslavement to American finance-capital.

President Hoover was at that time the American Secretary of Commerce. It was he who organized a conference of the automobile manufacturers of America and advised them to turn their attention to Liberia, the only territory except Abyssinia in Africa not yet stolen by the European imperialists, and which offered a means of solving the rubber problem then confronting the American capitalists.

With the assistance of Hoover and the Department of State, the Harvey Firestone Rubber Co., one of the biggest manufacturers of motorcar tires and rubber goods in America, secured a concession in Liberia of one million acres of land at the price of one cent per acre for the purpose of developing rubber. In return for this great concession, the Firestone Co. made a loan of 5 million dollars to the Liberian Government, which, however, the Liberians never received, for the Firestone Co. stipulated special terms to the effect that the money had to be spent in developing railroads, roads, and building a harbour in Monrovia by American engineers. The Liberian Government under pressure from Washington was also forced to agree to supply labour to the Firestone plantations.

This agreement was completed in 1925. Since then, Liberia has become an economic colony of American imperialism; and the peasantry, the slaves of the Government and the Firestone Co.

Slavery and Forced Labour.



Firestone and Ex-President King in conference over the sell-out of Liberia

The conditions of the working class in Liberia, especially those in the interior, and the agricultural labourers on the American plantations and big farms owned by the native officials, are so disgraceful that an investigation had to be conducted this year. The commission which carried out the investigation was composed of three men, one by the name of Dr. C. Christy, an Englishman, representing the League of Nations, Dr. Charles S. Johnson, a Negro college professor, representing the United States Government, and Edwin Barclay, Secretary of State of Liberia, who has since become president.

The commission discovered that slavery and forced labour were widespread throughout the country. The report pointed out that, most of the Liberian officials, known as Americo-Liberians, who control the Government, and were the very ones who made the agreement with the Firestone Co. in 1925, were forcing thousands of poor native peasants to work without wages under the most terrible conditions. But as to be expected from a commission which represented imperialist interests, it reported that Firestone did not use forced labour. This, however, is a lie. Every honest Liberian and West-African knows that thousands of natives are being robbed and ruthlessly exploited on the Firestone plantations. In this way the handpicked commission tried to whitewash the crimes of Firestone and his gang, and discredit the already corrupt Americo-Liberian officials, thereby, justifying the American imperialists with the tacit connivance of the League of

Nations, to openly annex the only remaining independent Negro country in West Africa.

The Negro Judasses.

The Negro workers in Africa, America, and the West Indies must realize that the enslavement of Liberia has not only been organized and carried out by the American imperialists and their white agents, but that the so-called "big" Negro leaders both in America and Liberia have been some of the most active tools of Firestone in helping to oppress the toiling masses of this "independent" republic.

This has openly been revealed by the fact that the American Government, which supports the policy of Firestone in Liberia, did not select a white official to represent the United States on the international commission as is its usual policy. On this occasion, the politicians in Washington departed from their traditional policy and appointed a Negro lackey, Dr. Johnson, to play the role of a Judas in covering up the crimes of the white American capitalists and help make it appear that only President King and his officials were guilty of extorting forced labour out of the indigenous masses.

This is nothing strange. It merely shows to the Negro workers that despite the fact that the Negro capitalists are members of the same race as themselves, the truth is, these people are always prepared to betray the interests of the toiling masses of their own race for the benefit of their white imperialist masters. Therefore, we must not only expose the connivance of Firestone, but we must brand these so-called educated Negroes as the greatest traitors of the working class.

The conduct of Dr. Johnson is not an isolated case. His part in the subjugation of the black workers and toiling poor of Liberia is being repeated by hundreds of other Negro middle-class elements in America, Africa and the West Indies, day after day. Everywhere we see black lawyers, doctors, preachers, editors, chiefs and politicians openly going over to the side of the white oppressors.

As the capitalist crisis becomes more and more acute, the Negro capitalists, landlords, and phrase-making reformists are revealing themselves more and more before the hungry, overtaxed and unemployed Negro masses as their greatest enemies. Their acts of deception, betrayal and surrender of the national liberation struggles at this time clearly show that such scoundrels are incapable of leading the movement of the Negro peoples for freedom and social emancipation. Only the Negro working class in unity with the workers of other countries and races can fight the imperialists to a victorious end. These are the only sincere anti-imperialist elements whom the capitalists cannot corrupt and bribe.

Mr. Schuyler Exposed.

It is important for every Negro worker to take note that, whenever the American and other white capitalists have some dirty task to perform in connection with Negro countries like Haiti and Liberia, they always secure the services of some black lickspittle who is supposed to be a "big" leader of his race, pay him a few dollars or give him some petty office and thereby get him to do the job for them. The usual policy in America is to have the President take his photo with the Negro in question or have a glass of tea, and the whole betrayal is settled. While in the British Empire, the King on the recommendation of the colonial governor confers some title upon the Negro lackey, and he will be prepared to surrender his people and country to the imperialists. France also pursues a similar policy as in the case of Blaise Diagne, the Senegalese Under Secretary for the colonies.

George Schuyler, the well-known Negro reformist newspaper correspondent, who poses before the oppressed masses of his race in America as one of their most "radical" leaders, to-day stands like Dr. Johnson, exposed as a mere demagogue, phrase-monger and fraud, who delights in making "left" speeches about "Negro freedom", "the liberation of the working class" and things of the sort, but does nothing to actively aid in carrying on the struggle against American imperialism. Behind this kind of "left" demagogue, Schuyler has been able to mislead certain sections of the Negro middle-class youth in America in supporting his petty shop-keeping schemes, but his recent conduct in connection with Liberia shows him for what he is, a tout of the ruling class of America and one of the greatest enemies of the Liberian masses.

Mr. Schuyler has tried his best to help the Firestone Co. to fasten its stranglehold over one and a half million black men, women and children in Africa. Let us see how this lickspittle played his part.

Some months ago, Schuyler was sent to Liberia by a group of white capitalist newspapers, chief among J. P. Morgan's "**New York Evening Post**", for the purpose of completing the task which his bed-fellow, Dr. Johnson, started earlier in the year.

As to be expected of a typical middle-class phrasemonger, charlatan and bombast, Schuyler continued to whitewash the Firestone Co. of its crime against the oppressed masses of Liberia. The goodly gentleman was so hypnotized by what he considered an important journalistic mission for Wall street bankers, that all he could see was the misdeeds of a handful of native politicians like President King and his gang, who after all, were the henchmen of Firestone.

The Americans now consider the time favorable to prepare the way for open annexation of Liberia, so their scheme is to mobilize the public opinion of the so-called civilized world — by this they mean the other imperialist nations — and have them believe that the American capitalists are more humane than the Liberian ruling class, and therefore justified to take over the full administration of the country in order to "safeguard" the interest of one and a half million natives who inhabit the hinterland, and who form the source of labour supply for Mr. Firestone and the other European imperialists who own plantations in the Congo, Fernando Po, and the Guinea Coast.

This is an old imperialist trick. But such is the stupidity of the man, George Schuyler, the lackey and intellectual prostitute of Messrs. Firestone and Co. that he is unable to see through the whole nefarious scheme of his masters.

The capitalist proprietors and editors of the "**New York Evening Post**", the leading propagandists of American imperialist expansion in Africa, were so pleased with the slanderous articles of "Uncle Tom" Schuyler, especially his glorification of Firestone's love and kindness for the Africans (strange Firestone's philanthropic reputation among his white slaves in his rubber factories in Akron, Ohio, is still to be discovered by Mr. Schuyler!), that they gave the widest publicity to the articles, not only in their own press, but they found Negro reformist papers like the "**Pittsburgh Courier**" base enough to publish this kind of imperialist propaganda against a little Negro state.

This again shows us how depraved and bankrupt the vast majority of Negro newspaper editors are. They will sell themselves and the masses for a few crumbs from their overlords under the belief that they are supplying their readers with "news". This is just how Schuyler tries to cover up his treachery.

Now what is the purpose of this vicious campaign of lies carried on against this little Negro republic? On the one hand, the American capitalist press is trying to free Firestone of all responsibility for the widespread existence of forced

labour in Liberia, and on the other, supporting the American capitalists in Africa by pointing to their moral obligation of setting themselves up as self appointed trustees like Great Britain.

This in brief is the whole motive back of all the dirty work started by the investigation commission and endorsed be the renegade and "socialist", George Schuyler.

America supported by League of Nations

The stage is fast being set for the final enslavement of Liberia. The next step will witness the open annexation of the country as a colony of Yankee imperialism under the guise of a mandate. Already some of the leading powers in the League of Nations have indicated their willingness to approve of such an step by America, notwithstanding the fact that Liberia is a member of the league, while America is not.

For example, in a symposium on Liberia published in "**West African Review**" (August 1931) — an organ of British imperialism — we quote the following illuminating excerpts which should tend to remove any doubts from the minds of the most naive people like Mr. Schuyler, concerning the attitude of the white imperialist powers towards this land of the blacks.

The Right Hon. W. G. Ormsby-Gore, M. P. Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in the late Conservative Government, writes:

"I hold very strongly that the European Powers, and particularly Great Britain, must keep out of Liberia and decline to take any responsibility whatsoever. The real responsibility already rests, and must continue to rest, on the Government and people of the United States of America. Rule in Liberia is exercised exclusively by American Negroes sent there, established, financed and supported by the United States. **The United States in general, and the Firestone Company in particular have, de facto, a complete stranglehold over the country.** (emphasis mine — G. P.) The financial adviser to the Liberian Government has always been an American. Only one Government has the Power to effect reform, and that is the Government of the United States — and having all the power and all the assets in its control it, **eo ipso**, has the responsibility."

Sir Alfred Sharpe, K. C. M. G., a British Colonial Governor, says:

"There is only one remedy, and that is for Liberian territory to be taken over by one of the **white nations** (emphasis mine — G. P.) and put in proper order. Who is to do this? It comes down to a question of America or England. There is only one other nation which might be said to be interested, individually, in Liberia, and that is France, for the reason that she would like to have a right of way from her own hinterland of French-Guinea across Liberian territory, to a port on the Liberian coast.

America is interested, firstly, from the fact that the United States were responsible for the creation of this Black Republic, and secondly, owing to their **large financial interests there, the Firestone Rubber Company, and the loans made from America.**" (emphasis mine — G. P.)

Mr. R. C. F. Maugham, C. B. E., who from 1913 to 1920 was His British Majesty's Consul-General in Liberia, has the open affrontry to remark:

"That Liberia should longer be permitted to remain an independent Republic is neither more nor less than a scandal which the League should lose no time in bringing to an end. It may safely be said that Liberians as a whole cannot be entrusted with the governance of between one and two millions of helpless Africans, nor should a division of the West African coast lands, situated between two progressive colonies, be permitted longer to stagnate in their unworthy,

incapable hands. That being the case, the administration of the country should be removed from their control, and handed by the League, under Mandate, to one or other of the great colonising powers." (emphasis mine — G. P.)

Yes, Mr. Schuyler and you other bankrupt and philistine misleaders of the American Negro masses, the proletarians of all lands will number you among those hangmen who helped the Yankee bankers to tie the final knot around the necks of the Liberian working class.

Now, what do the above quotations prove? They clearly expose the conscious policy of the capitalist powers to deprive Liberia of her sovereignty and to intensify the exploitation of the toiling masses of the country. Here again, we see the open robber-policy of the League of Nations which does not even make the usual diplomatic pretence of defending Liberia, but rather, is prepared to support America, a non-member, in stealing the territory of a member state.

This only shows the Negro masses and the working class in general the real character of the League — a combination of powerful imperialist powers dominated by England, France and Japan, whose sole purpose is to pounce down upon weaker nations, enslave the colonial and semi colonial masses of China and Africa and steal every foot of land from defenseless peoples and plan intervention in Soviet Russia. This is the only purpose for the existence of the League of Nations.

Workers Defend Liberia

The present situation in Liberia calls for the most determined struggle on the part of the international working class, especially the proletariat in America, against the ruthless exploitation of the American capitalists in Africa.

The Liberian situation clearly shows that whatever might be the contradictions and jealousies between the imperialist powers of Europe and America, when it concerns Africa and the Negro masses they are prepared to arrive at some common agreement for dividing the spoils and maintaining their domination over the African masses.

There is only one force that the imperialists are afraid of, and that is the organised working class and toiling peasantry of Africa, which, with support of the revolutionary working class movement of Europe and America alone can defeat and shatter the imperialist aims of American and League-of-Nations imperialism.

The Negro Workers' Congress Prediction True.

Already at the first Congress of the International Conference of Negro Workers held in Hamburg, Germany, in July 1930, the attention of the Negro toiling masses throughout the world was called to the danger of Liberia being deprived of the little freedom which it still enjoys by becoming an open slave colony of America, like the Philippines and Porto Rico, where there is not the slightest pretense of independence.

Furthermore, the Congress in a special resolution adopted against imperialism pointed out the diplomacy of the white imperialists in using the Negro national reformist leaders — like Marcus Garvey, Blaise Diagne of Senegal, Dr. Du Bois, William Pickens, Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Randolph, Schuyler, Kelly Miller, Dr. Moton, Oscar de Priest and others — as their agents in paving the way for increasing attacks upon the standard of life of the Negro masses.

The Congress called upon the Negro workers not only of Liberia but the United States, the West Indies and other colonies to rally to the defence of the

national independence of the last black state in West Africa. In view of the increasing danger which threatens Liberia, it becomes the immediate duty of the Negro workers and their class-conscious white brothers, and all sincere and honest fighters against imperialism to organize protest mass meetings and demonstrate their solidarity with the Liberian working class against American imperialism, the League of Nations and their black lackeys.

Every opportunity must also be taken to expose the whole system of forced labour, slavery, unemployment, starvation, oppressive taxation, and official terrorism, which exists in the British, French, Belgian colonies, in South Africa, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique, and South-West-Africa, linking up the struggles of the Liberian masses with those of other parts of Africa who suffer even more terribly under the brutal whips of European slave masters.

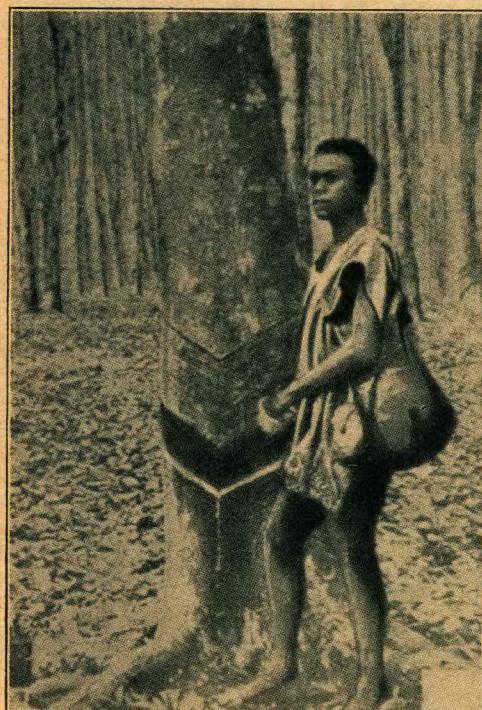
What the Workers of Liberia must do

The very first task which stands before the workers, especially the seamen and dockers in the coast ports of Liberia, such as Monrovia, Great Bassa, is to organize themselves into trade unions as the basis for the development of a broad mass anti-imperialist movement; for only in this way will the Liberian workers be able to defend their economic interests and carry on the struggle for improving their political and social conditions.

The Liberian workers must not put faith in the Americo-Liberian politicians, whether True Whigs or so-called opposition People's Party. These fakers, in the face of the growing indignation and protest of the masses against the foreign imperialists and the native oppressors, will try to deceive them with radical phrases, only to betray them as King and his handmen.

The workers must depend only upon themselves. They must develop leaders from the ranks of their class. People who feel oppression and exploitation, and will not desert the struggle or be bribed by the capitalists.

The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers will give its fullest support to the toiling masses of Liberia in building up an militant trade union movement which alone will guarantee an uncompromising struggle against Yankee Imperialism and the native exploiting class of capitalists, landlords and slave holding officials.



Native worker collecting rubber on one of Firestone's Plantations