

First International Conference of Negro Workers

By V. CHATTOPADHYAYA.

THE idea of an international conference of Negro workers was first mooted at the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism, held in July, 1929, at Frankfurt-am-Main, where among the 400 odd delegates that came from all parts of the world there were a number of Negro delegates from Africa and America, besides various non-Negro delegates directly interested in the organization of the Negro masses for the struggle against imperialism.

Reports Submitted.

The reports submitted to that Congress on the conditions of life of the Negro masses under British, French, Belgian, Portuguese and American imperialist exploitation showed clearly:

(1) That there was a considerable similarity in those conditions in the various African colonies.

(2) That the Negro workers in the various colonies were isolated from one another and from the workers of other countries.

(3) That the vast Negro masses were completely unorganized.

(4) That they were being politically misled and deceived for the benefit of the capitalists and imperialists by Garveyism, pan-Africanism, national reformism and trade union reformism.

It was felt that it was essential to undertake the organization, particularly the trade union organization, of the Negro workers, the co-ordination on an international scale, and the organization of the anti-imperialist struggle of the Negroes on a class basis as against the racial nationalism that was being preached by black capitalists and agents of imperialism.

In order to achieve these ends, a Provisional International Committee of Negro Workers was constituted under the chairmanship of James W. Ford, national organizer of the Trade Union Unity League, U. S. A., and it was resolved to convene an international conference on July 1, 1930, to take place in London, the metropolis of the largest slave empire of the world.

"Labor" Government Closes Door.

But at this critical moment the profits and privileges of the British slave-drivers are being carefully protected by the "labor" government and the organizers of the conference were informed on May 21 that his majesty's government would not allow the conference to be held in London.

The organizers then decided to hold the conference in Hamburg, where, after unavoidable delays, occasioned by the change in its venue, it was opened on July 7. There were delegates, including a woman, from seven important unions in the United States of

America (miners, railway workers, needle trades, etc.) and delegates from Jamaica, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and from the former German colony of Cameroons, as well as a white delegate from the South African Negro workers' organizations.

Owing to the absence of representation from the French colonies, from East Africa, from the Belgian and Portuguese territories, and from the Latin-American countries, it was obvious that this first meeting of Negro workers was more a preparatory conference, the political importance of which is none the less very considerable. The very fact that such a conference was held and the clear line of policy and action laid down in the resolutions are bound to have a strong influence upon the development of the struggle.

Conference Agenda.

The agenda of the conference included all the important aspects of the problem. After messages of solidarity had been personally delivered by the fraternal delegates of the League Against Imperialism and the International Red Aid, and letters and telegrams had been read from the Red International of Labor Unions, from the Red Sport International, from the Proletarian Congress of Labor, Manila, etc., a comprehensive report on the work of the International Committee during the eleven months of its existence was made by James W. Ford, showing the great difficulties met with in getting into touch with the Negro workers in most parts of Africa, as well as the successes achieved by the organizers in the short time at their disposal.

The various delegates dealt with the conditions of the Negro workers in their respective countries, special interest attaching to the report made by Small on behalf of the Bathurst Trade Union, which had conducted a valiant fight at the end of the last year against the Margarine Combine.

A very clear and instructive statement was made by George Padmore of the Negro Trade Union Committee of the R. I. L. U., on the "Economic struggles and tasks of the Negro workers."

He summed up the effects of imperialist exploitation on the condition of the Negro masses; pointed out that the mass struggles of the millions of super-exploited Negroes in Africa and America against the imperialist offensive (South Africa, Nigeria, Gambia, Equatorial Africa, Haiti, the West Indies and the U. S. A.) coincided with the revolt of other colonial peoples (India, Indo-China, etc.) and with the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the capitalist countries; warned the workers against the national repression of the Negro middle class and intelligentsia; drew attention to the increasingly favorable objective condi-

tions for the development of working class leadership, and sketched the outlines of a program for the revolutionary organization of the millions of toiling peasants. These facts were incorporated in a resolution that was unanimously adopted.

Patterson, of the American Negro Labor Congress, made an appeal for a more "vigorous struggle against forced labor and poll tax." He warned the Negro workers against the legislative illusions deliberately created by the League of Nations and the International Labor Office and called upon them to resort to direct action to recover their lands, refuse to pay taxes or rent, repudiate indentures, to fight against the "pass" and the "compound" system, to fight against their tribal chiefs who are agents of imperialism, etc.

Very important at the present moment is the resolution on the "War Danger and its significance to the Negro masses," presented by Macaulay of the National Democratic Party of Nigeria.

After pointing out how black troops have been used for decades as cannon fodder by the imperialist powers and how they have even been employed to crush the revolutionary movement of the workers in the im-

portant of the Federation are openly refusing to organize the unorganized workers and are proposing that the union members give up all the hard-won benefits of organization. This program means that the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers declares itself bankrupt as a labor organization and becomes a company union.

A broad united front, based on the mills, of all militant organized and unorganized workers, members of the federation and the National Textile Workers Union, must at once be formed. The unemployed workers must be included in this united front, which must raise the unemployed program of the Trade Union Unity League as adopted at the Chicago Employment Convention.

United front committees of action must be set up in the union and non-union mills. These committees must especially include young workers and women. Powerful workers defense groups must be organized to combat the organized gangsterism of the officialdom.

Part of Class War.

The struggle of the hosiery workers is part of the general struggle of the textile workers which is led by the National Textile Workers Union. This attack by the bosses and the sell-out of the Federation officials is part of the general attack of the capitalists and its accompanying sell-out maneuvers of the A. F. of L. in the entire textile industry. It is not merely a wage-cut that confronts the hosiery workers, as well as all textile workers. It is a wholesale campaign of the capitalist class to reduce to starvation levels the standard of living of the working class.

The hosiery workers must unite their impending struggle with the general struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation.

They Must Fight.

There can no longer be any doubt that the hosiery workers, especially in the famous Kensington textile region of Philadelphia which is the main center of the hosiery industry and the largest textile center in the country, mean to fight this Fall. Together with the textile

Soviet Miners Get Benefits Unknown to Workers Here

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MINE workers in the Soviet Union benefit as do all others in the workers' republic. Their freedom is a startling contrast to the mine worker's life in the capitalist United States. Every worker who has been in the Soviet Union knows that recent charges in the American capitalist press claiming that Russian coal is mined by "convict or forced labor" are nothing but capitalist propaganda against Soviet Russia.

Only six hours a day underground, security from haunting fears of unemployment, accident, illness or old age, membership in the Mine Workers' Union, to which all mine workers belong—these conditions make the Soviet miner a free and self-respecting worker in the first socialist state. Miners' representatives through the union are part of the management in the industry. The Mine Workers' Union is a free social association, an organ of the same class that controls the state. Miners' representatives sit on central boards and departments of the workers' government.

The hosiery workers must unite their impending struggle with the general struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation. They must throw overboard the Rieves, Smiths, McKeowns, Holdermans, and the U. T. W. factors. The fighting program of the National Textile Workers Union, the Communist Party program of class against class, provide the only road to victory for the hosiery workers.

Month's Vacation With Pay.

Underground workers in the Soviet Union receive a month's vacation with full pay every year. Surface workers enjoy a two weeks' vacation, also with full pay. In cases of sickness or accident, when a worker is unable to work, he is given his full pay and all his medical attention free during the time he is off. If he is so ill that he has to stay in the hospital, he is cared for free of charge, and in

meetings of Hamburg workers who extended an enthusiastic welcome to the Negro delegates a few of whom spoke at the meeting.

The conference which was marked throughout by enthusiasm lasted three days and ended fittingly with the singing of the Internationale. An official invitation was extended to the delegates to proceed to Moscow to attend the Fifth World Congress of the R. I. L. U. as guests. Eleven delegates have already accepted the invitation. Those who were unable to do so have sent the fraternal greetings of their organizations to the congress.

American Negroes Most Clear.

There is one observation that deserves to be recorded regarding the Negro Conference. There

addition he receives 75 per cent of his regular wage if he is married and 50 per cent if he is single.

Every producing organization or mine pays annually a sum equal to about 15 per cent of the total payroll for these forms of social insurance, including the free medical service, sick benefit funds, unemployment and old age insurance. Such social insurance for mine workers is unknown in capitalist United States.

Housing is free for workers in the Soviet coal fields, or the charge for rent is so small as to be merely a nominal payment. Electric light, fuel and other municipal services are entirely free. Working clothes, boots, tools, caps, etc., are supplied free of charge or at a very low rate. Restaurants subsidized by the administration supply food at low prices. Clubs, nurseries and schools are also supported by the administration. The Workers' Club, for instance, at Stalin Coal Mines in the Donetz Basin, is a fine modern building, with many large windows giving light and air in the halls and recreation rooms,

Even conservatively estimated, these additional benefits received by Soviet miners amount to no less than 50 per cent of their money wages. This brings the average daily wages for face miners to six rubles (\$3) a day, or about 50 cents an hour. Contrasted with the terrible uncertainty of unemployment, part time work and illness in American mines, this regular wage makes the Soviet miner a free man.

Every miner in the Soviet Union belongs to the Mine Workers' Union. He cannot be discharged from the mine without due cause. Often workers who have been discharged are reinstated by the union in cases that a board member here would have no chance of winning. The miner gets his job through the free government employment agency. Upon giving due notice a mine worker in the Soviet Union is free to leave his job at any time. Final authority in the workers' republic rests with the rank and file workers.

was a marked difference between the Negroes from the United States who are industrial workers with completely proletarian psychology and outlook, and the delegates from Africa who have more of the mentality of the small farmer. The conditions of the problem in Africa necessitate different methods and tactics from those in the U. S. A., and there may be a tendency for the Negro workers from the U. S. A. to look at the African Negro question too much from the American point of view. Nevertheless it is a gain to the African worker to come into contact with the representatives of the far more advanced Negro proletariat of America. This contact has been achieved by the conference.