

THE NEGRO MASSES AND THE IMPERIALIST WAR

By CYRIL BRIGGS.

The participation of thousands of Negro workers and agricultural laborers in the August First demonstrations against imperialist war preparations is of the greatest significance in its confirmation of the correctness of our estimate of the temper of the Negro masses and of our present approach to Negro work. It is significant, too, in its revelation of the growing impotency of the Negro petty bourgeoisie for betrayal of the Negro masses.

Bourgeois Democracy a Sham.

Twelve years after the "war to make the world safe for democracy," the Negro masses of the United States find bourgeois democracy as much of a sham and mockery as before 1914.

Betrayed by the Negro petty bourgeoisie (preachers, business men and intellectuals) into support of the imperialist war, deluded by fake promises of equal rights and self-determination as a reward for support of their imperialist oppressors in the war against German imperialism, the Negro masses were not long left in doubt as to the cynical dishonesty of these promises.

Negro Soldiers Jim-Crowed.

Even at the height of the war, when capitalist America was putting forth its greatest effort against its imperialist competitor, and when Wilson was prattling the hypocritical phrases of "fighting for the rights of the weaker peoples," of "making the world safe for democracy," etc., the Negro soldiers were separated into Jim-Crow regiments, commanded by white officers selected for the most part from the South, "because they understand the Negro," and used as labor battalions for the unloading of munitions in French ports. That they were ultimately sent to the front was due to military exigency, operating to thwart the United States imperialists in their plans to further degrade and humiliate the Negroes by slandering them as cowards, incapable of standing the gaff of the big guns, or of meeting the white man in armed conflict, afraid of cold steel, etc. Realizing that the Negro masses would assuredly some day revolt against the special oppression and degradation for which American imperialism has singled them out, the imperialists were opposed to giving Negroes proper military training, especially as officers. When the Negro troops were sent to the front it was without adequate training or preparation but in a spirit of premeditated murder. Cowed, oppressed at home, denied adequate training in preparation for the ordeal of modern scientific warfare, the imperialists did not expect the Negro troops to survive. And, as a result of their lack of preparation the casualty list was abnormally high at first.

Enemy in Front and Rear.

In addition, they were soon to discover that they had to fight two sets of enemies: the forces of the German imperialists (workers, like themselves, deluded into the imperialist slaughter) in front of them, and, in their rear the more danger-

ous Negro-hating United States imperialists. Negro soldiers returned from the war declared that of the two enemies the treacherous enemy in the rear was often the more dangerous. Officers and men of one of the detachments quartered at Camp Dix upon their return voluntarily made affidavits for the Crusader Magazine as to the hell they went through in combatting the discrimination and vicious propaganda of the white officers. They told of rank discrimination against Negro wounded on the field of battle, of how American doctors and stretcher bearers would deliberately walk past Negro wounded to give aid to white soldiers, including even German wounded, who were then considered "enemies"—of the financial and commercial interests of American imperialism. In addition to the thousands slaughtered by throwing them untrained into battle, other hundreds died from neglect arising out of discrimination against their black skins. The white officers also spread stories among the French civil population to discredit the Negroes, one to the effect that Negroes were beasts and rapists, that they were a species of monkeys and had a two-inch tail projecting from their spinal vertebra and concealed by their clothing.

Lynching Continued.

Nor was there any modification in the oppression of Negroes "at home." Jim Crowism, segregation, discrimination in all spheres of activity, disfranchisement, lynching, were all rampant as before. One of the most atrocious lynchings—that of a pregnant woman whose womb was slashed open and the unborn baby crushed under the heels of white planters—occurred while Negro troops were at the front fighting for their imperialist oppressors, and while America was loudly denouncing the atrocities of the German command.

Lesson Learned.

The Negro workers have learned their lesson. On August First, together with the white workers, they gave notice to capitalism that in the coming imperialist war and in any attack against the workers' state, the Soviet Union, they will fight for their own interests and against the imperialist oppressors. Together with the revolutionary white workers in the "home" countries and with the revolting colonial masses, the Negroes of this country will carry on the struggle for the overthrow of the imperialist system, for the defense of the Soviet Union, for the right of self-determination for the African, West Indian and Southern Negro masses, and for the establishment of a Soviet United States as their only certain guarantee for full political, economic and social equality and for the abolition of lynching and racial and economic oppression.

Demand the release of Foster, Minor, Amter and Raymond, in prison for fighting for unemployment insurance.