

The Southern Vagrancy Laws

By CYRIL BRIGGS.

VAGRANCY laws constitute one of the most brutal weapons of repression in the armory of the southern bosses for use against the oppressed Negro and exploited white masses. These laws in their present form, first appeared during the so-called "Reconstruction Period," when, the Northern forces having withdrawn on the basis of an agreement between the former slave holders and the northern capitalists, the former slave holders turned to the job of re-enslaving the "freed" Negro.

One of the most effective means towards this end was the Vagrancy Law, utterly vicious in character and sweeping in scope. While formulations differ in the various states, the following, from the Mississippi Vagrancy Laws is a good example of how the southern bosses, encouraged by the northern capitalists, set about to re-enslave the Negro masses.

"That any freedom, free Negroes or mulattoes, over eighteen years of age; found on the second Monday of January, 1866, or thereafter, with no lawful employment or business, or found unlawfully assembling together in the day or night time, and white persons so assembling with freedom, free Negroes or mulattoes on terms of equality, or living in adultery or fornication with a freed woman, free Negro or mulatto, should be considered vagrants."

The fear held by the oppressor class for

its Negro victims is quite clearly revealed in these laws which make illegal any assembly of Negroes "together in the day or night time." Closely exposed, too, is the role of the capitalist state in officially branding the Negro race with the stigma of inferiority, and in making it criminal for Negro and white workers to fraternize with each other. Here is sharply depicted the fear of the bosses that, unless divided by race prejudice and hatred, the white and Negro workers would get together for joint action against their common oppressors.

Negroes Sold Into Peonage Under Vagrancy Law.

Under the Vagrancy Laws thousands of Negro workers are being arrested every year and sold into peonage through the capitalist courts, to any planter who comes forward and pays their fines. Payment of their fines by a planter is the beginning of debt slavery of hundreds of thousands of Negroes. Negroes are picked up by the police on the grounds of not having a job when millions are jobless, inability to pay their street taxes, when millions are on the verge of starvation.

Vagrancy Law Used to Prevent Negroes From Organizing.

Vagrancy laws are used in all the southern states to prevent Negroes from organizing by the simple expedient of arresting the organizers and by "picking up" strangers and north-

ern Negroes, charging them with being vagrants and railroading them into peonage. Vagrancy laws are being used today against the Communist Party, the Trade Union Unity League and the American Negro Labor Congress, whose organizers were arrested a few weeks ago in Birmingham, Ala., and jailed as vagrants for their working-class activities. The Birmingham bosses and their police have threatened to arrest as vagrants every organizer sent into the South by these class-struggle organizations.

These laws are boss class legislation of the

known to the Cuban workers as well as to the revolutionary Chinese workers in America as one of the most brilliant and brave fighters. It is precisely since Machado deported four Chinese comrades to Chiang Kai-shek to be executed, that Comrade Wong took the leading part in organizing the Chinese workers for struggle. And it was his credit and effort that the revolutionary activities of the Chinese workers were increasing as a result of Machado's deportation campaign. Such fighters do not "commit suicide."

In one of Comrade Wong's letters, he wrote, "Our best comrades were deported, but we will not give up the fight; on the contrary, we must work harder than ever before." Prior to his arrest, in connection with the convening of the Soviet Conference in China, he drew up a leaflet in which he urged the Chinese workers in Cuba "not only to celebrate and defend the Soviet Power in China, but to also unite with Cuban workers to fight for a Soviet Government in Cuba."

Just a few days before his assassination,

most vicious kind and must be fought with the full energy of the working class, united, black and white, under the leadership of the Communist Party. Negro and white workers must be mobilized for relentless struggle against these laws and all other class legislation, for full support to the struggles of the oppressed southern Negro masses, and for their right to have their own government in those sections of the south where they constitute a majority of the population, and for the demand for full political, economic and social equality.

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Building Work Down

The official labor report for the month of June dealing specifically with building industry is compelled to state:

"During the month of June permits were issued in 45 Illinois cities for a total of 2,483 buildings with an estimated cost of \$10,676,951. This is a decline in estimated valuation of 42.2 per cent from the May total, and a decline of 54.0 per cent from the total for June a year ago. The total expenditure authorized in Chicago during the month dropped sharply from the May figure, the decrease amounting to 59.2 per cent. Chicago, in fact, is mainly responsible for the decrease in valuation from the May figures, as the combined figure for the rest of the state was only slightly less than in May. The decline in valuation in Chicago this June compared to June last year was 64.1 per cent likewise a great decline than that reported by the rest of the state."