



Dixie—Where a Nation is Chained to the Soil

By JAMES S. ALLEN

manded the continuation of food allowances: the food—from one to two dollars worth of coarse corn meal and fatback for each family for a week—which is supplied by the landlord or credit merchant at exorbitant prices and at high interest to be taken off the croppers' part of the crop at harvest, had been cut off by the landowners on July 1 after the crop had already been cultivated, leaving the peasants to starve until cotton-picking time in September. They demanded the right to sell their cotton themselves ("Let it stick where it is picked," is how the croppers phrase it): for the landowner always sees to it that the cotton travels directly from the fields into his own barn. They demanded cash settlement for the season at cotton-picking time: for the planter never gives his cropper any kind of cash settlement, seeing to it (he keeps the accounts) that he owes the cropper nothing, but instead that the cropper owes him and is therefore forced to remain in debt slavery. They demanded the right to have their own gardens: for the cropper is forced to plant cotton and corn which the landlord can take and sell, while a cropper's garden would deprive the planter of a great source of profit from "selling" food. They demanded a 9-month Negro school with free school bus: for 30 per cent of the Negro children in the South do not go to school at all and most of the other children go only for two or three months in the whole year—to provide more "hands" for the planter on the fields. And uppermost in the whole agitation of the croppers was the demand for the freedom of the Scottsboro boys.

But the landlord power learned a bitter lesson, which now has been administered in even a sharper dose at Reeltown. They found that they were not dealing with "Uncle Toms" and that "Simon Legree" no longer evoked the terror he had been accustomed to. They suffered from the illusion that things would go as well for them as at Elaine, Arkansas, in 1919, when a share-croppers union was smashed and 200 Negroes killed by the Bourbon terror. They found that the idyllic picture drawn up for them by the Negro gentlemen at neighboring Tuskegee Institute of a cringing, submissive Negro peon, existed only in the imagination of these gentlemen. For the Negro croppers defended themselves, and although it was only

buckshot they had against rifle bullets and machine guns, they were able to stop the terror short after it had murdered Ralph Gray, cropper leader, and caused four others to "disappear."

And if the lords of rope and faggot moved cautiously it was due not only to the fact that the croppers were organized and militant, but to the very uncomfortable and penetrating thought that the eyes of the world masses were turned on Alabama. The Scottsboro case had encircled the world and the Negroes were no longer an isolated people suffering and struggling in a hidden corner but had entered the field of battle in alliance with the most potent revolutionary force in the world—the working class.

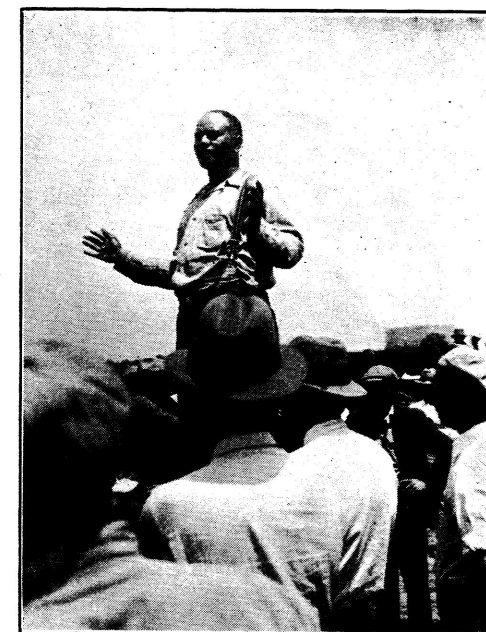
It was not the croppers who retreated in this

first clash. The big landlord clique stepped back aghast before the immensity of the struggle opened at Camp Hill. For it was the first forerunner, and Reeltown the second at even a faster clip, of the whole revolutionary struggle for Negro liberation. Tallapoosa County, Alabama, differs from the other 350 counties of the Black Belt which runs like a sickle through 12 Southern states, only in the fact that the Negro peasants there have definitely and unequivocally entered upon the struggle for national emancipation. Otherwise the conditions of exploitation and oppression of the Negro majority throughout the Black Belt are the same. The majority of the Negroes here are landless peasants. From a standard of living which can hardly be called living they have been thrust into the very

jaws of the crisis by the planters and bankers. The rules of ordinary "civilized" capitalist society are suspended for them; instead the ruling class has called forth from a previous century especially brutal methods of terrorization and torture. They are an oppressed people, forcibly retarded at a level of economic and social growth below that of any other layer of the American population. And as the "lowest layer" they are likely to move first and in such a manner as to burst asunder the whole top rock of century-old oppression. The whole direction of the movement can only be towards the possession of land which has been denied the Negro peasantry although they form the majority on this land, and have ever since cotton first began to blossom in the South. And as history is not bashful in pronouncing: the cry for land is accompanied by the cry for freedom—in this case the cry for the right of self-determination, the right of the Negro majority to set up a republic and choose for themselves whether to remain totally independent or be federated with the existing government of the United States.

All this is inherent in the Scottsboro case and in both battles in Alabama. Both the Camp Hill and Reeltown conflicts have shown that the slightest struggle carried on by the Negroes in the Black Belt immediately raises paramount issues for solution and inevitably takes on a most serious character. The Black Belt is, at present, the most sensitive spot in the whole armor of American imperialism. Events in Alabama and the Scottsboro case have transplanted Lenin's words into the soil of the South: "The tendency of every act of resistance on the part of oppressed peoples is the national uprising."

The continued and persistent organization work by the croppers in Alabama after the Camp Hill battle showed that the movement was so deeply rooted that it could withstand terrific shocks. The croppers continued their work. The Union spread into four adjoining counties. Action was again taken. Croppers on one large plantation won the right to sell their own cotton; on another plantation relief was obtained from the planter for a number of starving cropper families. Literature was distributed. When planters asked Sheriff Young, who led the lynch mob at Camp Hill in 1932, to



raid the cabins of the cropper leaders and confiscate the literature, he replied: "As long as they leave me alone, I'll leave them alone." The planter power had become extremely wary.

For the croppers were showing signs of advance on the most crucial point—the winning over of the white tenants and small white landowners. "Poor whites" were fraternizing with the Negroes! They came into their cabins, borrowed and lent from meagre cupboards—and sat down to eat from the same table with Negroes. White tenants were inquiring as to how to join the Union. The crisis was grinding out its grave-diggers.

Summer had left more than its share of starvation. Winter came to Tallapoosa—into bare cabins with empty cupboards. The planters pressed hard, lifting cattle and whatever belongings still remained to the croppers. Both sides were gathering their forces. And when the landlord power tried to take Cliff James' mules in payment for a debt to a big white landowner, they tried once too often. The details of what ensued is too well known for us to go into here, except to emphasize—and this cannot be over-emphasized—the fact that the "poor whites" of Tallapoosa had reached the point where they helped the Negroes by various methods to resist and finally force the withdrawal of the lynch gangs.

Nor must we overlook the role played by Tuskegee Institute, the bastard child of Booker T. Washington and the Bourbons. The act of its officials in turning over the wounded Negro share-croppers, Cliff James and Bentley, to the ruling class to be murdered, was merely the act of sealing in the blood of the Negro masses an alliance with the lynchmen which had been in force for fifty years.

Camp Hill, Reeltown, and—these, and others will come, are but forerunners of the fundamental struggle for Negro liberation. They face the working class as a token of the militancy and revolutionary power of the Negro masses. They must evoke from the working class a fervent and immediate tender of immediate and material aid.

THE blaze of guns at Reeltown (Notasulga), Alabama, on December 19, 1932, informed the world in staccato terms for the second time in a little over a year that the Negro share-croppers of Alabama's Black Belt had entered upon a determined struggle with the ruling class. Fire from old shotguns shook the very ground under the century-old system of oppression and exploitation. It was not so much the number of shots fired by the Negro peasants, but the issues at stake, blazoned across the heavens in flame, that set the ground trembling under the feet of the slave-drivers and bankers who had sucked the life-blood from millions of Negro peons, ever since modern slavery first watered the soil of the Southern cotton plantations.

What had been evident only in isolated instances or in blurred form before, became clearly evident with the first armed clash of the Tallapoosa County croppers and the landlord-capitalist power in the battle at Camp Hill on July 15, 1931. No sooner did the Negro sharecroppers begin the organization of their Union and enter upon a struggle for the most "elementary" economic demands, when they found the whole lynch-terror power arrayed against them. Without even the slightest pretensions of "democracy," without any recourse to the usual formal trappings of capitalism, the landowners and credit merchants set out to destroy the Union with bullets and fire—for the system of which they are the lords recognizes no human rights for the Negroes and needs no pretty dressing for the barrels of its guns.

To one uninitiated to the semi-feudal tenant system which enslaves the Negro peasantry of the Black Belt and extends its ball and chain to all layers of the Negro toiling population, the demands raised by the Share-croppers' Union would seem "elementary" enough. But inherent in their demands and in the fact that Negro croppers even dared to formulate them and organize around them, was a thrust at the whole economic basis of the enslavement of the Negro people. They de-



UPPER LEFT: *The Fiery Cross.* Symbol of terror and lynching raised whenever the Ku Klux Klan gathers at the bosses' call to frighten the Negroes into silence.

LOWER LEFT: *Home.* This wretched hovel is home to three generations of Negro plantation hands in the Bayou country of Louisiana.

CENTER: *Cotton is King—and the southern ruling class his henchman.* Bent backs, aching fingers, starvation wages, Jim Crowism and lynching for the Negro workers. Alabama cotton has once more been stained with their blood.

UPPER RIGHT: *Negro and white—unite.* Negro ex-serviceman calling on a crowd of Negro and white workers for a militant fight against starvation and persecution.

LOWER RIGHT: *In the "free" North.* What used to seem the haven of refuge to Southern Negroes—Harlem. The same Jim Crow streets, schools, treatment—and houses like this one don't look much better than share croppers shacks in the Black Belt.

