

Senate Action Shows Cynical Lynch Support

Workers' Answer Must Be Renewed Herndon, Scottsboro Fight

By Cyril Briggs

Thirteen years after the defeat of the Dyer anti-lynching bill by a filibuster in the Senate, another measure, also ostensibly directed against lynching, has been practically killed by that representative body of the white ruling class.

Last Wednesday's action by the Senate holds many valuable lessons for the Negro people and all sincere fighters, white and Negro against lynching and the bestial oppression of the Negro people. First, however, let us briefly consider the tactics by which the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill was side-tracked in the Senate. This was accomplished by the tricky maneuver of the Senate "adjourning" and instantly reconvening. Could hypocrisy be more glaring? Could support of lynching be more cynical and brazen?

This fake adjournment, which was engineered by Democratic leader Robinson within a few hours of a conference with President Roosevelt at the White House, was preceded by a series of other tricky maneuvers. These tricky stunts provide a graphic example of how the ruling class plays with the lives and interests of the toilers, Negro and white.

The open, cynical support of lynching reflected in the Senate's action is still more glaring when one analyzes the weak Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill. The bill was certainly not intended as an effective curb on lynching. It not only fails to provide for the death penalty for lynchers, but by reason of its deliberately vague definition of a "mob" could easily be used against any assembly of workers held to protest the very crime against which it is supposedly directed. By the same token, it could be used against strikes and other struggles of Negro and white workers.

What, then, provoked the rage of the Southern lynch-lords against this innocuous so-called anti-lynching bill? That rage was evoked by the fear that discussion of lynching might bring out on the floor of the Senate and in the press some of the hideous details of the persecution and oppression of the Negro people, and by the dread that such an exposure would further intensify the already powerful resentment of millions of toilers, Negro and white, against the lynch terror, against jim-crow oppression of the Negro people. Indeed on this latter point, the sponsors of the bill were in practical agreement with the lynch lords, but merely pursuing different methods. The bill, which was sponsored by the reformist leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was brought forward with the aim of quieting the mass resentment against lynching which had reached a high point around the time the bill was first broached.

All the rabid hatred of the white ruling class for the Negro people it oppresses, all the putrid slander by which it seeks to justify its plundering and persecution of the Negro people found expression on the Senate floor, but even a discussion of lynching was tabooed by Democratic and Republican Senate leaders.

The Southern Democratic Senators threw aside all the pretense of "fairness" and "impartiality" of the lynch courts, so assiduously peddled by the Negro reformist leaders in their sabotage of the mass fight for the Scottsboro boys. They came forward in open defense of lynch law and Negro oppression. Senator Smith, in whose State of South Carolina thousands of white working class women are driven into prostituting their bodies to keep alive, justified the refusal of Southern officials to indict and prosecute the lynchers of Negroes, with typical Bourbon demagoguery:

"Certain acts committed are beyond the reach of any court or jury is the opinion of any right-minded man or woman. The virtue of a woman is a thing that should not be displayed in the courts."

With other leaders of Roosevelt's party, he opposed even the lip service of the sponsors of the Costigan-Wagner bill to Negro rights as a "violation of State's rights"—the right of Southern bosses to lynch Negro workers for protesting robbery and oppression, for demanding their wages.

The Negro reformists gave aid and comfort to the lynch rulers not only by their treacherous sabotage of the mass united front fight against lynching, but by the fraudulent figures on lynchings they release annually. These figures, issued by Tuskegee Institute and the N. A. A. C. P., were quoted by the Southern Democrats to minimize the lynch evil, to hide the growth of the lynch terror.

The action of the Senate in blocking even a discussion of lynching on the Senate floor emphasizes once more the correctness of the Communist position that the fight for Negro rights can be carried forward only by mobilizing the largest masses of white and Negro workers, and of all sincere friends of the Negro people, behind that struggle. The answer to the Senate's action must be an intensification and strengthening of the mass fight around the Scottsboro and Herndon cases, against all acts of oppression against the Negro masses, and for the national liberation of the Negro people.