

# Negro Revolutionary Hero — Toussaint L'Ouverture

By CYRIL BRIGGS

THE IMPERIALIST ideology of white superiority, by playing to the vanity of the undeveloped white workers, enables the imperialists to carry out their policy of aggression and oppression abroad and working-class disruption at home. In the south it is utilized to prevent cooperation between white and black workers and to win the acquiescence of the latter in the brutal treatment accorded the Negro masses by the white ruling class. Every precaution is taken to keep the black and white workers apart. There are separate schools for their children, separate entrances to railway stations, separate parks, Jim-Crow sections in theatres, street cars, etc., separate wash rooms, separate restaurants. And not only are Negro workers barred from parks and other public places of recreation in the white sections of most southern cities, but white workers found frequenting the dilapidated sections where Negroes are forced to live soon become unpopular with the white ruling class.

In support of this policy of racial separation, the press, the schools, the stage, the church, all available instruments of the capitalist class are utilized for the purpose of poisoning the minds of the white workers with the virus of race hatred and prejudice. North and south, the capitalist class in its text books and newspapers, in its literature and art, takes great pains to depict the Negro race as a race of savages, hopelessly backward and depraved. Every prostitute capitalist editor, every prostitute "intellectual" adds his lying quota to the sum of libel against the Negro. Tons of books, and miles of articles are printed in the effort to impress the white workers with the lie, a thousand times repudiated by science, that the Negro race is inferior. Conveniently forgetful of the white slaves of Rome and the indentured white laborers shipped by England to the American colonies, white bourgeois writers continuously harp upon the three hundred years of Negro slavery in America, at the same time indulging in the most malicious mendacity in the effort to make the Negro out as something apart, something different, from the general run of humanity. In their inverted sense of justice they place the stigma of slavery on the victims of the system rather than on the white Christian ruling class which instituted it, in off moments from worship, and thrived on slavery and the slave trade, building out of its profits huge cities and edifices of worship to the glory of god.

It is the aim of these bourgeois writers to impress their readers

with the suppositious servility of the Negro, so they maintain a discreet silence on the heroic slave insurrections, on the glorious daring of Denmark Vesey, of Ben Turner and scores of other Negro revolutionaries. When they speak of the emancipation of the Negro from chattel slavery they say nothing of the heroic contributions of Negro soldiers to the victory of the Union forces and therefore to their own emancipation—such as it is.

A gigantic conspiracy of silence is maintained by the bourgeois writers as to the achievements and revolutionary traditions of the Negro peoples. Historical facts are distorted or soft-pedaled to suit this purpose. Bourgeois pseudo-scientific writers go to ridiculous lengths to malign the Negro and to conceal all evidence of the revolutionary role played by the race they designate as servile and slavish. One particularly amusing instance sticks in my memory. One of the multitudinous fly-by-night authors of books on Africa, essayed the following description of an East African tribe, noted for its warlike disposition: "these people are black, with woolly hair, but, of course, they are members of the great white race." In addition to being ready to defend themselves against imperialist aggression this tribe had retained a high culture, unaffected by the disruptive violence of the slave trade which had destroyed numerous other native civilizations. So the bourgeois gentleman felt it necessary to deny that they were Negroes.

While the imperialist ideology of white superiority and its committant of Negro inferiority finds ample repudiation in the sciences, it is also overwhelmingly refuted in history — perhaps nowhere more strikingly than in the Haitian Revolution. Here was the first and only successful slave rebellion in history—a rebellion of Negro slaves against the might and power of the French counter-revolution under Napoleon. Negro soldiers, freed from chattel slavery by their own hands, defeated and conquered the flower of Napoleon's armies long ere Napoleon met defeat at the hands of rival imperialists! These same Negroes had previously destroyed several Spanish armies sent against them by the Spanish imperialists in the east of the island and had sent skulking back to Jamaica a British army which, in traditional British imperialist manner, sought to take advantage of the confusion in the island to plant the Union Jack in Haiti. Wendell Philips, one of the leading abolitionists, said in a speech delivered in Boston in December, 1861:

"There never was a slave rebellion successful but one, and that was in St. Domingo (Haiti). Every race has been, some time or other, in chains. But there never was a race that, weakened and degraded by such chattel slavery, tore off its own fetters, forged them into swords, and won its liberty on the battle-field, but one, and that was the black race of St. Domingo."

Even Spartacus and his brave legions were finally defeated. Only the Negro race in Haiti ever succeeded, unaided, in freeing itself from chattel slavery.

The principal leader of the Haitian Revolution was Toussaint L'Ouverture — named by his soldiers L'Ouverture, *the opening*. Toussaint L'Ouverture was fifty years old when he appeared on the scene as the leader of the revolutionary slaves. There had been several slave insurrections before he openly took a part in the struggle, although it is believed he secretly encouraged the liberation movement, holding himself in the background until it had gathered sufficient momentum.

The island was torn with strife between various groups and classes. On one hand the revolutionary slaves, numbering some 500,000, at last in motion and grimly determined to wrest their liberty from the white and mulatto slave holders; opposed to the thirty thousand white planters, whose class interests had led them to repudiate the revolutionary regime in France, divided in their allegiance between the British and Spanish imperialists, with some of them gesturing toward the slave power of the United States; and opposed by and opposing the other two groups, the twenty-five thousand mulattoes who owned one-third of the real estate of the island and held many slaves, but who were now in retreat in the mountains, following a vain attempt to have applied in Haiti (for the benefit of their own group, not for the slaves) the slogan of the French Revolution of "Liberty, Equality;" the Spaniards on the east triumphant; the British on the north entrenched.

Within seven years, the blacks and the mulattoes, now fighting shoulder to shoulder under the leadership of Toussaint, Christophe, Dessalines, Francois, and others, had smashed the Spanish forces and consolidated the island for the first and only time in its history. They had defeated the British and sent them skulking back to their base at Jamaica.

So far, the self-emancipated slaves had made the mistake of holding the island in the name of France. They had also made the blunder of limiting the revolutionary demands to the abolition of slavery and had not included a demand for the land. The leaders of the revolution even went further in this mistaken policy, issuing a proclamation to the refugee white planters to "come home and occupy your lands and houses." But, fortunately, the master class was not to be satisfied with such magnanimity. Nothing less than the re-enslavement of their former chattel property would satisfy them. And, finally they thought they saw the opportunity.

The French Revolution had definitely turned into bourgeois channels. The few radicals who had striven to win the revolution for

the proletariat had been murdered, with the connivance of "The Mountain." Robespierre and others of this group later paid with their own lives for this folly. Finally, Napoleon had risen to power. Victorious in Europe and determined to crown himself emperor of France, this military adventurer deemed it necessary to find work outside of France for the best of the Republican troops. Thirty thousand French troops, with a tradition of unbroken victories were sent to re-enslave the Haitians.

The imperialist world joined whole-heartedly in the conspiracy. The imperialists of Holland lent Napoleon sixty ships for the transportation of his troops. England, by special message, promised to be neutral. The self-emancipated people looked out upon a hostile world, upon all the forces of imperialism arrayed against them. L'Ouverture, when he saw the mighty armada nearing the Haitian shores, turned to Christophe with the words, "all France is come to Haiti; they can only come to make us slaves; we are lost!"

But the Haitians were in no mood to submit to the plans of the French bourgeoisie for their re-enslavement. Withdrawing to the hills, L'Ouverture issued his famous proclamation, instructing his people to "burn the cities, destroy the harvests, tear up the roads with cannon, poison the wells, show the white man the hell he comes to make." The Haitians met the attempt to re-enslave them with war to the hilt. They exhausted every means at their command, seized every weapon, to turn back the tyrants with a vengeance as terrible as their own. They opposed the French landing, fighting hand-to-hand battles in the streets of the city, and driving the French back to their boats.

Failing to accomplish their dastardly purpose by force of arms, the French command resorted to treachery. They offered peace with liberty. Toussaint L'Ouverture made the mistake of believing them. He called upon the Haitian revolutionaries to lay down their arms. As soon as this was done, L'Ouverture was invited to a conference with the French command, tricked and seized and placed on board ship and taken to France. There the brave son of the tropics was imprisoned in an underground dungeon in a chateau in the Alps. Not dying fast enough to suit Napoleon, that monster instructed his jailor to take a vacation in Switzerland, taking with him the key to the dungeon. Upon the jailor's return he found Toussaint L'Ouverture dead of starvation. But if Napoleon and his class hoped to break the spirit of the revolution by the murder of its outstanding leader, he was soon to discover his mistake.

From the moment Toussaint L'Ouverture was betrayed, the Haitians began to doubt the French and rushed to arms. And the strife became bloodier than ever. The revolution took on a new

aspect. Napoleon sent over thirty thousand more of his best troops. But nothing could daunt the Negroes determined upon defending their newly won liberty. The French planters and officers exhausted every form of cruelty. They went to the Dark Ages of the Christian Inquisition for examples and even invented a few which would cause those priestly inquisitionists a thrill of sadist joy. They chained to rocks in the desert sixteen officers of the revolutionary army, leaving them to be devoured by poisonous reptiles and insects. They sent to Cuba for bloodhounds. When they arrived, the daughters and wives of the planters went down to the wharf, decked the hounds with ribbons and flowers, kissed their necks, and then went to the amphitheatre to applaud as Negro prisoners of war were thrown to these dogs, made mad with hunger. But the Negroes besieged this city so closely that these same women were forced to eat these very hounds they had welcomed as weapons of savage blood-lust against the Haitians. The French commander in his chagrin sent word to Dessalines that when he captured him he would whip him to death like a slave. Dessalines chased him from battlefield to battlefield, and finally permitted him to leave the island with his shattered forces under cover of the British flag.

Wendell Philips, from whose Boston address I have quoted above, made the following eulogy of Toussaint L'Ouverture:

"You think me a fanatic tonight, for you read history, not with your eyes, but with your prejudices. But fifty years hence, when Truth gets a hearing, the Muse of History will put Phocion for the Greek, and Brutus for the Roman, Hampden for England, Lafayette for France, choose Washington as the bright, consummate flower of our earlier civilization, and John Brown the ripe fruit of our noonday, then, dipping her pen in the sunlight, will write in the clear blue, above them all, the name of the soldier, the statesman, the martyr, TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE."

Wendell Philips appraised Toussaint L'Ouverture according to the standards of his class and day. Today with the proletariat in power over one-sixth of the globe and steadily moving forward, under the guidance of Marxism and Leninism, there are different standards and the great Negro revolutionary takes his place with the revolutionary heroes and martyrs of the world proletariat. Not with the men of the bourgeoisie, but with the heroes of the working class. To the black and white revolutionary workers belong the tradition of Toussaint L'Ouverture. We must see to it that his memory is not wrapped in spices in the vaults of the bourgeoisie but is kept green and fresh as a tradition of struggle and an inspiration for the present struggle against the master class.

For the full emancipation of the Negro masses of the U. S.!  
For the liberation of Haiti from the heels of United States Marines!