

THE NEGRO WORKERS IN NORTHERN INDUSTRY

By OTTO HALL.

National Field Organizer of the Workers (Communist) Party

In traveling through industrial centers in the United States, one is impressed with the general similarity in appearance of the so-called "Black Belts" in the various cities. Go to any city that has a



OTTO HALL.

large Negro population and it is not difficult to find the Negro section. It is only necessary to take the nearest street car, ride out to the oldest and most dilapidated section of the city where streets are dirtiest, lined on either side by

tumble-down shacks or old fashioned flats (usually condemned), and one finds himself in what is sometimes politely called the "colored neighborhood."

Proletarian Districts.

These neighborhoods usually border on, or are directly in what was formerly known as the "Red light districts." Although these districts are according to law, supposed now to be non-existent, prostitutes, white and black, "ply their trade" in these neighborhoods, and bootleg joints and cabarets are "wide open." Young Negro children growing up in this environment, "learn the ropes" at a very early age. Almost every night, groups of idle rich and other parasites, themselves responsible for the miserable conditions obtaining in these ghettos, drive up in fine limousines (usually parking them in the next block) flaunting their wealth squeezed from the toil of these same people in their faces, in order to corrupt Negro women, whom they consider their legitimate prey. The object of these excursions of the rich in the Negro districts, is to indulge in what is known as "changing their luck."

The so-called "better class" of Negroes, comprising professional men and women, such as lawyers, doctors, dentists, politicians and wealthier Negroes, live in somewhat better houses, usually at the edges of these districts, in flats or houses

that were formerly occupied by middle class whites in the 90's or earlier, for which they pay high prices. Some of these Negroes, in order to escape being segregated in black belts, buy houses in so-called "white" neighborhoods, which is resented by the "exclusive" whites, and brings about clashes which have sometimes resulted in race riots.

The worst parts of these districts are usually occupied by the newly arrived Negro workers from the South, who are forced to live in these congested districts, paying enormously high rents for small dingy flats. Usually the family is forced to live in one room and to rent out the other rooms to lodgers. Most of these workers earn on an average less than \$20 a week, and pay rents averaging \$70 a month or more for 4 or 5 room flats with almost no modern conveniences. In order to make this rent they are often forced to run what is known as "buffet flats", places where they sell moonshine and rent "transient" rooms. These houses are allowed by the landlords to rot away and are hardly ever kept in repair.

In most of these cities, the Negro is discriminated against in the better class of restaurants, theatres and other public places. The forms of this discrimination are regulated by local conditions in different centers. In Pittsburgh they display quite openly, in the white restaurants,

signs reading "We do not cater to Negroes", while in some cities, other methods are used. For example, in Detroit, a prospective Negro patron is offered a meal in the kitchen. In Cleveland at one of the many "Thompson one-arm potomaine foundries," the writer stood at the serving counter for a full half hour and when he asked the "counter boy" when would he serve him, this dumb, misguided, \$14-a-week, capitalist-minded slave told him that if he didn't have time to wait till he got around to him, he could go elsewhere.

There are usually no good hotels in these cities where Negroes can find accommodations. The so-called "Negro Hotels" are usually tumble-down places without even ordinary conveniences and charge double what a white hotel of a similar class would charge. If a Negro wants to find lodgings or to eat, he must go to the "Negro section" which is usually an out-of-the-way place, far away from the center. This inconvenience is also experienced by the Negro worker who works in places located in the downtown or outlying districts. If, for instance, a Negro working in some of the downtown places wants to lunch, he is compelled to either bring his lunch with him to work, or go to some restaurant in the Negro district which is usually too far away for his convenience.

Proletarianization.

More and more Negroes are being drawn into the industries, particularly since the war, and the subsequent process of rationalization has brought about the increasing mechanization of these industries enabling the industrialists to use less skilled labor and increase their forces of semi-skilled or unskilled workers. This process is bringing about the rapid proletarianization of the Negro masses. These Negroes are usually unorganized and are given the worst and most dangerous jobs and paid the lowest wages.

Every means possible is used to keep the workers of different nationalities and races divided. Among the various nationalities, religious differences are sharpened, and between the Negro and white workers the question of color is emphasized. One of the many methods used is to make a difference in the wages of the Negro and white workers. On some jobs we find that the white worker is given a little more money for the same work. This gives the white worker a feeling of superiority over the Negro and causes him to look upon his fellow-worker with contempt. In many factories they have separate locker-rooms, dressing rooms and rest rooms for Negro workers.

Organizations comprised of Negro petty-bourgeois intellectuals, politicians, backed by these white capi-

talist "philanthropist" factory owners, organize so-called "welfare associations" which are used by the capitalists to further this antagonism, using these Negro welfare clubs, etc., as a sop to the Negro workers.

Some Negro intellectual tool is given a paid job by the corporation as the head of the organization in the particular factory. These organizations attempt to prevent the Negro worker from fighting against "Jim Crow" conditions in the plants and to prevent him from organizing with the white workers.

Usually some Negro stool-pigeon is used to organize a Jim Crow company union and in order to put these unions over, the plea used among the Negro workers is, "We must have our own organization." These conditions are prevalent in almost all industrial centers where Negro workers are employed.

Growing Class Consciousness.

We, ourselves, have noticed the sharpening of class lines within the Negro race, but the important thing for us is, that the Negro workers themselves are beginning to recognize this difference. The Negro worker is beginning to recognize himself as a class and is fast losing confidence in the middle-class intellectuals and big Negro politicians, who were formerly accepted by the Negro masses as their leaders. The Negro workers are beginning to see through the fake pretenses of "race

loyalty" that these so-called leaders have used to betray them to the white ruling class.

At a meeting with a group of Negro workers, several questions were put to them by the writer, concerning their attitude toward these Negro politicians, business men and professionals. The answer given and opinions expressed by these workers were very clear and sharp on this matter. One worker expressed himself in the following manner, concerning Negro professionals, viz:

"These so-called 'Big Negroes', doctors, lawyers, don't care anything about us workers, all they are concerned about is to get themselves a swell home and a car. When they get a little money, they can't see us 'for the dust' when they meet us on the street."

Another worker expressed himself on Negro bourgeois politicians of the republican, democratic and socialist parties in a similar emphatic manner:

"I have lived in this town for more than 20 years and have seen these Negro capitalist politicians come and go. We've had Negro republican and democratic aldermen in our ward and sent several to the state legislature. But what's the use? Look at the condition of our streets; they haven't been repaired since they were first paved. The garbage

stays in the alleys until it rots—you can smell it now—and they do nothing about it. They don't make any kind of fight against race discrimination. The only thing they are concerned with is the graft they get from the 'up-stairs crap games', 'buffet flats' and 'blind pigs'. They come around on election days to tell you how much they are going to do for their race and when they get in office you need a high-powered telescope in order to see them."

Negro Preachers.

Another worker gave us the "low-down" on preachers. He said that all these preachers work for is to get enough money to buy some old abandoned white church and bleed his congregation for the rest of their lives to get it paid for. Another said that Negro landlords were even worse than white ones and that he never would work any more for a Negro boss. They think that you ought to be ready to work for less pay and longer hours for them just because they are colored.

In the following articles, I will tell about my organization experiences among the Negroes, their response to our meetings, etc. Among the many points I will touch on, are the effects of our election campaign on the Negro masses, their attitude toward trade unions, religion and their reaction to our Communist program and general lessons of the tour.