

ARE NEGROES HARD TO ORGANIZE?

By TOM JOHNSON.

THERE has always existed in the American labor movement the conception that Negro workers are more difficult to organize, are harder to keep in the unions, and are less militant in the struggle than white workers. This wrong conception even gained a certain foothold in the revolutionary section of the labor movement, where it not infrequently found expression in capitulation before the supposed difficulties in organizing the Negro workers.

As long as the revolutionary movement failed to make a serious start in organizing and leading into struggle the Negro proletariat, this remarkable "theory" could not be answered from actual experience. Now we have made this start, and in Ohio recent struggles of the Negro workers, led by the Communist Party and the Trade Union Unity League, have provided us with this much needed experience. Our conclusions, based on these struggles, must be that the Negro worker quite often displays more fighting courage and greater tenacity in the struggle than his white brothers. Two examples will suffice.

In the organization of the Council of the Unemployed in Cleveland it was the Negro workers who took the lead, who were most active and ready to work for the building up of the Council. In the demonstrations of the unemployed in Cleveland the Negro workers played a tremendous role, in some cases they were the backbone of the demonstration. When, in the middle of February, 3,000 unemployed workers battled for over half an hour with the police on the steps of the City Hall, the Negro workers were in the front ranks. And in consequence it was the Negro workers who suffered most from the brutality of the police. Not one of the Negro workers who had their heads split in this struggle with the police, left the Unemployed Council. On the contrary, this sharp fight strengthened their determination to carry on the struggle in a militant manner.

And today in the strike of 1,500 coal miners in Eastern Ohio and West Virginia, the Negro workers are again showing themselves the most militant section of the strikers. The strike committees at both the Glendale and Alexander Mine in Moundsville, West Virginia, are led by Negroes. Altho a minority of the strikers, it is the Negro workers who are leading the mass picket lines, who are instinctively following a revolutionary line in their conduct of the struggle.

Across the Ohio River from Moundsville, where the Powhattan mine is on strike, it is no exaggeration to say that the strike would be lost today and the men back at work, were it not for the militancy of the Negro miners. The brutal attacks of deputy sheriffs and company gunmen on the picket line, the blubbing of pickets and the use of tear gas bombs, have been unable to break the determination of the Negro strikers to carry the strike thru to a successful conclusion. When some of the white workers on the strike committee, after the last assault on the picket line by 30 odd deputy sheriffs armed with tear gas bombs, raised the question of calling off the strike, it was the Negro members of the strike committee who refused to even consider this proposal and led the fight against it. Largely due to their militancy this temporary vacillation was overcome immediately and the ranks of the strikers closed for further struggle.

The answer to the "theory" that Negro workers are harder to organize and are less militant than white workers may be found in the following figures relating to the strike. There are today (February 26) some 60 scabs in the Alexander mine, around 150 in the Powhattan mine, none in the Glendale mine. Not one of these scabs is a Negro. There have been some 19 strikers arrested on the picket line in Powhattan. Less than one fourth of the 600 strikers are Negroes, yet of the 19 strikers arrested for their militancy on the picket line 16, or all but 3 are Negroes.