

The Black Ten Millions

By Robert Minor

(Second Part.)

WHAT does the Negro in America require in order to escape his condition as an oppressed race? He requires:

Abolition of restrictions upon his right of residence; that is, abolition of "black-belt" segregation.

Abolition of distinction between Colored and white children in the schools; which distinction, with segregation, results not only in perpetuating race hatred, but also in the starvation of Negro schools.

Equal right to vote in the South.

The organization of millions of unorganized Negro wage-laborers in industry, in the same unions with white workers.

The organization of the Negro tenant farmers and share-farmers of the South to fight against peonage and other terrible hardships.

Abolition of laws in the Southern states which put the Negro on a sub-human plane, such as the laws against inter-marriage.

Abolition of the Jim Crow system on the railroads, in the parks, theatres, hotels, restaurants, and other public conveniences.

Drastic measures against lynching.

Drastic measures against the Ku Klux Klan.

Organized solidarity with the other groups of his oppressed race in other countries for common relief.

The Negro Sanhedrin.

How did the Negro fare in the supposedly great gathering of all Negro organizations, the Negro Sanhedrin Conference just closed in Chicago? All of the above questions were placed before the conference. The outcome of each was as follows:

When it came to the question of housing, it became evident that the Sanhedrin conference was heavily dominated by Negro business men. These men are theoretically in favor of the emancipation of their race. And they talk eloquently to this effect. But when Negro working people among the delegates, through a delegate representing the Workers Party, offered a resolution calling for legislation by which the black-belt residence district could be broken up and landlords compelled to rent living quarters at a fixed rental to the first comer regardless of color and independently of the landlord's will, this measure was killed because the Negro real-estate men make enormous profits by confining the Negro tenant to a given district and charging him from twenty per cent more to twice as much as is paid for similar residence by white persons. The Negro had to give up that demand in deference to the Negro real-estate men.

When approximately the same working-class elements supported a measure demanding the abolition of separate schools for white and Colored children, on the ground that such **separation** is but the preparation for a future life of **segregation**, a Negro school-teacher from Virginia

arose and protested excitedly against committing the Sanhedrin to such a measure. The very evident and scarcely concealed reason was that he was doing very well in a good job; since he profited by segregation of the Negro race in schools the Negro must remain segregated.

The Sanhedrin conference was slightly besprinkled with Negro employment agents connected with the white chambers of commerce. So the Sanhedrin flatly and cold-bloodedly rejected the proposal to organize the millions of Negro industrial workers and confined their expression to mild and meaningless phrase about equality in the labor unions for such negro wage-workers as are **already** organized.

When it came to the question of treating the Negro as a human being before the law in the most intimate phase of life, the phase of marriage—of course, everyone agreed that the black and the white race have always mixed and are now mixing, and that laws against inter-marriage are merely laws protecting the Southern white man in illicit sexual practices. But when the working-class delegates, through the Workers Party delegation, offered a motion demanding the abolition of the laws against inter-marriage,—it turned out that so many of the gentlemen and ladies present had to cater to the good-will of white philanthropists that the Sanhedrin conference had to give up any idea of demanding equality in law respecting marriage.

Every suggestion of organizing the millions of black tenant-farmers and share-farmers who live in virtual peonage in the South was too offensive to the **well-dressed** business-men and women, so the plan to organize the Negro tenant and share-farmers had to be dropped in favor of a meaningless phrase.

A vigorous resolution for organized protection against the Ku Klux Klan, introduced by the (working class) African Blood Brotherhood, was coldly rejected.

In short, nearly every measure that the Black Ten Millions require ran headlong into one vested interest or another of the Negro bourgeoisie, and expired, leaving this "All-Race" conference of American Negroes on record practically for the preservation of the present condition of the Negro.

Why? Because in this conference the Negro business man and society lady undertook to be the spokesmen of their people. And the Black Ten Millions have, to a certain extent, consented to let them be the spokesmen. The Negro in America is more or less proud of his bourgeoisie, or thinks he is; he has been trained to think, and he is now being propagandized to think that to have a class of prosperous, well-dressed, limousine-riding members of his race, is somehow to get out of the wilderness of oppression. The outcome of this conference ought to be a flash of light to the toiling, suffering black millions: the Negro bourgeoisie is allied, hopelessly tied up with the white bourgeoisie; the white bourgeoisie ruled the Sanhedrin Conference through its allies, the Negro bourgeoisie.

In referring to the "Negro bourgeoisie," however, it must be remembered that it is, correctly speaking, a petty bourgeoisie, subject to wavering between the capitalist and working classes, as was shown by the strong response to speeches of the African Blood Brotherhood and Workers Party delegates.

Mass Organization.

But there is much more to the Negro movement than appeared at this gathering. The great, silent millions who had so few champions there, have not been left untouched by the World War. The stirring of the Black Waters in 1917 started a new spring to flowing—the spring of mass organization. Many important Negro organizations exist and have existed for a long time. But none of them were mass-organizations.

The close of the war-period brought a new phenomenon—hundreds of thousands closely organized on a program of militant activity for race emancipation. The new phenomenon took place under the fantastic leadership of Marcus Garvey.

The biggest and most remarkable of all Negro organizations, the followers of Marcus Garvey, refused to be represented in the Sunshedin. This is much to be regretted. One may laugh at this self-styled "Emperor of Africa" and point out the hollowness of his program to "redeem the Ancient Kingdom of Ethiopia" by reconquering Africa for the Negro. Garvey may be what his critics call him: a windbag and self-seeker. But that does not close the question, for this writer. For the fact remains that Garvey organized four hundred thousand Negroes—the first compact mass organization of the race ever formed in the world.

Seven years ago this lone Negro landed in the United States from Jamaica, to proselytize for the "Universal Negro Improvement Association," which he had formed in Jamaica in 1914. There is a curious prejudice between Jamaica Negroes and American Negroes. Yet Garvey in five years destroyed the tradition that the American Negro masses cannot be organized. He organized nearly half a million active, dues-paying members (he claimed four million members) on a basis of militant race-consciousness. Race-consciousness in a dominant race takes the form of race arrogance, and we are accustomed to despise it as reactionary (which it is). But race-consciousness in a people just emerged from slavery and still spurred as an inferior people—may be, and in this case is, **revolutionary**. True, Garvey is a Bolshevick-batter. True, he might be called a "monarchist" since he set himself up as the "Negro King." He may yet be an instrument of the worst reaction and of ruin to his people, as indicated by his advice to them not to oppose the Ku Klux Klan, and by his recent concession to "white supremacy."

But Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association is a mass organization of four hundred thousand race-conscious Negroes, brought together on the basis of determination to throw off the remaining traces of slavery. Such a phenomenon cannot occur without **revolutionary effect**, no matter what its declaration of aims may be.

Garvey's organization fiercely proclaims itself to be a submissive, docile, anti-Bolshevick, reactionary organization. It tries to be. But look over the spontaneous, classic

labor. Those who would retain the division of society into an upper and a lower class, must and will retain race prejudice and the present "white supremacy" as sacred American institutions. Taking the facts as they are: In a class society the Negro will inevitably be used as bait for race-hatred in the waters of class conflict.

The Republican Party Goes Over to "White Supremacy."

The old, sentimental tradition to the effect that the Republican party seeks the freedom of the Negro is being exploded. Since 1875 the tradition has been a lie. Since the World War it has become a farce.

Capitalist interests have depended upon using alternately the Republican and Democratic parties. In those seasons when circumstances compelled their backing the Republican party, they found it embarrassing that the Solid White South voted always and automatically the Democratic ticket. With the Republican party black, there was no two-party system in the South. Yet the South is fixed in "white supremacy." To be able to swing the South at will either to the Republican party or to the Democratic party, the capitalist interests had to make the Republican party acceptable to the southern white man. To get the white vote, the semi-disfranchised and therefore half-useless Negro has to be disowned. So we see the Republican Party in a "Lily-White" movement in Virginia, Georgia and Maryland, notably, and in other southern states to less degree. In Virginia the leading Republican politicians have declared in principle against the holding of office by Negroes, but generously granting that the Negro should still have the right to vote for white candidates. In Louisville, Kentucky, the Republican political leaders adopted the practice of excluding Negroes from republican nomination; and the Negroes retaliated by putting up an all-Negro ticket for municipal offices.

In October, 1921, President Harding tried to draw the "white supremacy" vote toward the Republican party. He made a speech attuned to "white supremacy." With a little carefully applied salve for the Negroes along the conventional lines of ambiguity, Harding committed himself and his party as "uncompromisingly against every suggestion of social equality"—which, as far as it means anything, means every form of right that anyone may want to deprive the Negro of. To rid the Republican party of the black stigma to Southern white eyes, he even suggested that the (voteless) Alabama Negro ought sometimes to "vote for Democratic candidates"! And Mr. Coolidge in his turn appointed Stemp—whom the Negroes call "Lily-White Stemp"—to be his secretary-for-Southern-vote-catching.

The Negro started his American career in the class of "hewers of wood and drawers of water." He is there now. It is to the interest of the ruling class to keep him there, and at the same time to keep him divided from the other "hewers of wood and drawers of water"—the white working class—by fanning the flames of race prejudice. It is to the interest of all hewers of wood and drawers of water—white and black—to overcome race prejudice and to come together.

The Negro's fate in America lies in the labor movement, and there it is bound up with the exponents of the new order—the "radicals"—those who are fighting against

the skilled labor caste system and broadening the labor movement out to the vast millions equally.

But the Negro's fate is a political question. Again we say the Negro cannot free himself from lower-class status, nor from the race-hatred utilized to prevent the class system, until he helps to overthrow the class system. To get out of the exploited class, the Negro must abolish the exploited class.

Where Are the Negro's Allies?

To discover the forces that are ready to join hands with the Negro for his emancipation, for his equality without reservation or evasion, it would be well to compare the utterances of the American Negro bourgeoisie and intellectual with the utterances of the Communist International. The last Congress of the Communist International adopted a drastic program for the solution of the Negro's problem, both in America and internationally, and the following are extracts from its decisions:

"(3) It is with intense pride that the Communist International sees the exploited Negro workers resist the attacks of the exploiter, for the enemy of his race and the enemy of the white workers is one and the same—Capitalism and Imperialism. The international struggle of the Negro race is a struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism. It is on the basis of this struggle that the world Negro movement must be organized. In America, as the centre of Negro culture and the crystallization of Negro protest; in Africa, the reservoir of human labor for the further development of capitalism; in Central America (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Colombia, Nicaragua and other "independent" republics), where American imperialism dominates in Porto Rico, Haiti, Santo Domingo and other islands washed by the waters of the Caribbean, where the brutal treatment of our black fellow-men by the American occupation has aroused the protest of the conscious Negro and the revolutionary white workers everywhere; in South Africa and the Congo, where the growing industrialization of the Negro population has resulted in various forms of uprisings; in East Africa, where the recent penetration of world capital is stirring the native populations into an active opposition to imperialism, in all these centers the Negro movement must be organized...."

"(6) 1. The Fourth Congress recognizes the necessity of supporting every form of Negro movement which tends to undermine or weaken capitalism or imperialism or to impede its further penetration.

"2. The Communist International will fight for race equality of the Negro with the white people, as well as for equal wages and political and social rights.

"3. The Communist International will use every instrument within its control to compel the trade-unions to admit Negro workers to membership or, where the nominal right to join exists, to agitate for a special campaign to draw them into the unions. Failing in this, it will organize the Negroes into unions of their own and specially apply the United Front tactic to compel admission to the unions of the white men.

"4. The Communist International will take immediate steps to hold a general Negro Conference or Congress in Moscow."