

The Negro Finds His Place—and a Sword

By Robert Minor

THE political storm that is sweeping America today, tearing up old political parties and blowing all things into new lines of class arrangement, has reached the Negro. Anyone who attended the recent fifteenth annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People must be convinced that a black avalanche of twelve million people is about to crash through the landmarks of American political life. To the already roaring torrent of discontented workers and farmers is about to be added the Negro, who is also a worker and a farmer—and discontented. The final significance of the Negro convention just closed in Philadelphia can be summed up in three points:

1. A mass tendency to break away from the Republican party.
2. A tendency to align the Negro liberation movement with the labor movement.
3. A tendency to discard the half-century-old policy of compromise on questions of race equality, and to plunge into a fight for the complete effacement of the caste system in America.

These tendencies, taken together, are of revolutionary significance. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is not a revolutionary organization. Its list of directors contains no Bolsheviks, but ranges from Negro bishops, white reform-ministers, colored lawyers, social workers, and Republican politicians down to "retired" socialists. Yet this organization has undertaken from its beginning to deal with a problem which has no solution that is not revolutionary. It tries hard to be conservative, and at the same time to be consistent in a field where consistency is impossible without bordering close upon the edges of revolutionary significance.

This is understood only when we realize that the Negro's loyalty to the Republican party has always meant the Negro's solidarity with the American capitalist class. That alliance with the capitalist class was in the beginning an alliance with industrial capitalism against the semi-feudal southern aristocracy. Historically it was perfectly justified; it was progressive—even revolutionary, in its first years. The great black statesman, Frederick Douglass, spoke well when he called his people to this alliance; but he left them a legacy which now weighs heavy upon them, in the slogan: "The Republican party is the ship; all else is the sea."

And now, the dominant note of the Negro convention is the treason of the Republican party to its ward, the Negro. Starting with an explosive remark of R. J. Coles of Philadelphia, that "if the Republican party is the ship, then I personally am going to take to swimming," the note was taken up by speaker after speaker until it threatened for a time to obscure every other concern. "Abraham Lincoln is dead," said this Negro convention. "Lincoln is not dying," for office this year. "The party of Lincoln was one thing, and the party of Calvin Coolidge is another." The outcry reached its crescendo in a mass meeting attended by five thousand

Negroes, which developed into one of the most picturesque debates since Lincoln's battle with Stephen A. Douglas. The scouts of the Republican party had evidently foreseen what was coming, and Theodore E. Burton, who had made the keynote speech at the Republican convention this year, was at this Negro convention to defend the Coolidge administration. Mr. Burton received one of the most merciless drubbings ever delivered in the form of words. James Well-ton Johnson, a brilliant young Negro, coldly analyzed and demonstrated the "gentlemen's agreement" between the Democratic and the Republican parties against the Negro, which he said, and proved, had brought about the defeat of the antilynching bill in the senate.

Groping for a New Alignment.
The convention expressed its resentment toward the Republican party by issuing a document suggesting the desirability of forming a new party to be composed of the Negro and "other submerged classes." This action was weak and confused enough; only later events brought out the significance that lies in any effort to form a party of the "submerged classes"—with the Negro in it. But for the moment I speak only of the significance of the Negro's beginning to recognize his problem as a labor problem.
The Negro was brought to America as labor. The Negro was kept in slavery for the value of his labor. The Negro question, was a labor question throughout the two and a half centuries from the time of his arrival until the Civil War. The Negro question was a labor question in the politics that preceded the Civil War.

When the Civil War was won by the northern capitalist class, it was the triumph of one labor system over another. It was a solution of a labor question. The ultimate outcome of the Civil War of 1861-1865 was the completion of the system best adapted to modern capitalist exploitation of the laborer.

The Negro's emancipation can be completed only in the manner in which it was begun: by treating it as a labor class problem. Therefore, it was a bold step in advance when the convention adopted the following:

OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR, THE RAILWAY BROTHERHOODS, AND OTHER GROUPS OF ORGANIZED LABOR.

"Gentlemen:
"For many years the American Negro has been demanding admittance to the ranks of union labor.
"For many years your organizations have made public profession of your interest in Negro labor, of your desire to save it unionized, and of your hatred of the black 'scab.'
"Notwithstanding this apparent surface agreement, Negro labor in the main is outside the ranks of organized labor, and the reason is first, that white union labor does not want black labor and secondly, black labor has ceased to beg admittance to union ranks because of its increasing value and efficiency outside the unions.

"We thus face a crisis in interracial labor conditions; the continued and determined race prejudice of white labor, together with the limitation of immigration, is giving black labor tremendous advantage. The Negro is entering the ranks of semi-skilled and skilled labor and he is entering mainly and necessarily as a 'scab.' He broke the great steel strike. He will soon be in a position to break any strike when he can gain economic advantage for himself.

"On the other hand, intelligent Negroes know full well that a blow at organized labor is a blow at all labor; that black labor today profits by the blood and sweat of labor leaders in the past who have fought oppression and monopoly by organization. If there is built up in America a great black bloc of non-union laborers, who have a right to hate unions, all laborers, black and white, eventually must suffer.

"Is it not time, then, that black and white labor get together? Is it not time for white unions to stop bluffing and for black laborers to stop cutting off their noses to spite their faces?"

"We, therefore, propose that there be formed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Federation of Labor, the Railway Brotherhoods and any other bodies agreed upon, an interracial Labor Commission.

"We propose that this Commission undertake:
"1. To find out the exact attitude and practice of national labor bodies and local unions toward Negroes and of Negro labor toward unions.

"2. To organize systematic propaganda against racial discrimination on the basis of these facts at the great Labor meetings, in local assemblies and in local unions.

"The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stands ready to take part in such a movement and hereby invites the co-operation of all organized labor. The Association hereby solemnly warns American laborers that unless some such step as this is taken and taken soon the position gained by organized labor in this country is threatened with irreparable loss."

The strength of this action of the convention lies in the fact that it is a first historical effort of a modern Negro organization of mass influence, to line the Negro masses up with the new class which is destined to rise to power. The Negro's first step to equality is to attain equality in the organized working class. His second and final step to complete freedom will come with the rise of that class, black and white, to the position of the ruling class.

In a little Pennsylvania coal mining town a few weeks ago, a group of Czechoslovak and South-Slav coal-diggers worried over the fact that they seemed to obtain no adequate representation in the union's affairs, due to their inability to speak English. Their trouble was finally solved by a method which, I venture to predict, is prophetic of the future. The foreigners observed that not they alone were the outcasts, but that a little group of Negroes was also ignored and despised. Someone hit upon the idea of an alliance with the English-speaking pariahs—the Negroes. The Czechoslovak and South-Slav miners elected a Negro to go as their delegate to the Pennsylvania labor party con-



Lightning.

Hans Boettcher

vention, where the young Negro acquitted himself with honor.

This incident brings a sudden realization that the hundreds of thousands of Negroes who are flooding into the basic industries are sure to form a very heavy proportion of the English-speaking workers in the basic industries. For, little as it has been noted, the overwhelming majority of the workers in America's basic industries are immigrants from Europe, most of them suffering from unfamiliarity with the language of the country. And it is exactly these "heavy industries," which the Negroes are entering now in place of the old-time stream of immigrants from Europe.

The Negro convention at Philadelphia wanted to do something tangible toward aligning its people politically with other submerged classes. Right here it suffered from inexperience; it mistook Mr. LaFollette's convention of the "Conference for Progressive Political Action" for a convention of "other submerged classes." It sent a very dignified official letter to the LaFollette convention.

The Negroes were apparently unaware of some history of that small-businessmen's organization which they might as well learn now. In 1920, when the first "Farmer-Labor" party was formed in Chicago, an offer of the presidential nomination was made to the small-businessmen's leader, Senator LaFollette, on condition that he would agree to the platform. Mr. LaFollette refused the nomination on the ground that he objected to two points in the program. These two points were, 1—a meek demand for "industrial democracy," and, 2—a demand for political equality for Negroes. Mr. LaFollette said his objection to the demand for political

W. E. B. DuBois in his book, "The Souls of Black Folk," wrote:

"Before 1790, while the fire of African freedom still burned in the veins of the slaves, there was in all leadership or attempted leadership but the one motive of revolt and revenge—typified in the terrible Maroons, the Danish blacks, and Cato of Stono, and velling all the Americas in fear of insurrection." Eighteen of such insurrections or attempts at insurrection are recorded as having occurred before the American Revolution of 1776. Particularly terrifying to the whites were two slave insurrections in New York in 1712 and 1741. The American revolutionary period developed a considerable movement for inclusion of slave emancipation among the demands of the revolution. Because of southern opposition the movement failed, although it continued to be current after the revolution. This is important because it was the first sign of a white ally for the Negro. It was finally killed when, in the years following the Revolution, the newly-perfected cotton gin made Negro slave-labor more than ever profitable and the black human cattle returned to the stage of unmitigated exploitation. The series of armed slave rebellions began anew in 1800. A dozen more slaves were organized by Negroes before the time of the Civil War, the most noted of which were Denmark Vesey's conspiracy at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822 and the bloody revolt led by the black preacher, Nat Turner, in Virginia in 1831. The last of the purely Negro attempts occurred in Maryland in 1857.

The Period of Alliance With the Industrial Capitalist Class.
The next armed slave insurrection in 1859, was remarkable in that it was not a rebellion of slaves alone, but was led by a white man—John Brown. For the Negro had begun an active period of alliance. A great stratum of society, an important economic class, had begun to find an interest in common with the Negro slave. The northern industrial capitalist class, in order to break the power of the semi-feudal South, was forced into the expedient of destroying chattel slavery. This necessity brought about a common interest between the Negro and the modern industrial capitalist class; and in the logic of history an alliance was formed. It was an alliance perfectly justified in a historical sense, with progressive—even revolutionary—direct for the Negro. Frederick Douglass, the runaway slave laborer who became one of the two great statesmen of the Civil War, was far-seeing and wise in advising his people into an alliance with the Republican party of the years 1854 to 1870. But the declining years of Douglass saw this alliance become first a farce, then a travesty and finally the betrayal of the Negro people by the one-time ally, become an enemy.

Once having made the Negro a wage laborer, the industrial capitalist class had laid the foundation for its own enmity to the Negro. For the capitalist class has the function in life of exploiting labor. The Negro has become a wage laborer or poor farmer, to whom the capitalist class must now play the role of Simon Legree. The Louisiana sugarcane planter of 1840, buying Negro laborers at \$800 apiece, could afford to "wear 'em out in eight years." Gary, in his steel mills in 1924, renting Negro laborers from themselves at 43 cents an hour, can afford to "wear 'em out" at an unlimited rate of speed with no cost whatever for replacement.

Pickens sat with the audience, and waited. He waited until he saw that Johnston was steering the convention to a sudden end. A majestic lady had just finished some pleas-antries about "the women, the group that I represent," and Chairman Johnston was hastily smothering attempts to nominate a vice-presidential candidate, when the tall black man arose in the audience, shouting with a voice that couldn't be silenced, "You talk about the other groups? What about the American Negro? I guess the American Negro group has a right to be heard here?"—and, marching down the center aisle, jumped uninvited upon the platform. It was one of the only two spontaneous events in a long and tedious affair, and it took the audience by storm. Chairman Johnston, caught unawares, could only yield the floor. But while Pickens spoke, Johnston stood behind him with a running fire of low-spoken interruption. "Now don't talk long—only two minutes—understand?—only two minutes, now—get through quick."

Mr. Pickens made the mistake of his life. He made an eloquent plea that his race be remembered in this "new" political movement—but he failed to read to the convention the telegram on the Ku Klux Klan. Therefore, the delegates never knew that an important convention in Philadelphia had sent a formal message to their convention on one of the big issues of the day.

The Cleveland convention closed with the same position on the Klan issue that was taken by the Democratic and Republican conventions: "Cowardly evasion."
A few minutes later I asked Mr. Pickens to dinner. He because of the color of his face, and I because I was with him, were virtually thrown out of a restaurant. We wandered about the city of Cleveland, hungry and looking for a place where we could get a bite to eat. I had a taste of one of the petty humiliations that the American Negro, north and south, has to face every day of his life. We might almost as well have been in the middle of an uninhabited desert, until at last we found a humble working class "hash-er," where we were permitted the privilege of buying a sandwich. An otherwise trivial incident such as this is necessary to teach a white man that any political movement that is going to awaken the great Negro masses to its support will have to delve into this question which obesses every hour of the day, every day of the lives of millions.

But Mr. LaFollette represents an economic class that cannot become an ally of the Negro. Nothing is plainer than the fact that only the working class can espouse the black man's cause.

The question of class alliances plays an interesting role in the history of Negro emancipation. It can be summed up in three periods:

1. The period of primitive independent revolt.
2. The period of alliance with the northern industrial capitalist class, against chattel slavery.
3. The coming new period of alliance with the working class, against wage-slavery.

The Period of Independent Revolt.
The stage of independent, blind revolt of isolated groups of slaves through primitive armed insurrections, is recorded as beginning in Aylon's colony in territory which later became South Carolina, in the year 1526 before the establishment of the permanent English colonial slave system. Dr.

equality for the Negro was based solely on the ground of expediency. ("That's what they all say.")

But the Negro convention, apparently not knowing of the incident of 1920, and not yet having learned that the small-business politicians cannot fight for the "submerged classes," sent the letters to the LaFollette convention. They also sent the same people a telegram on the Ku Klux Klan issue. Second only to the question of the Republican party, in recognized importance to the Negroes, was the Klan issue. Anyone who wants to know what the Ku Klux Klan is need only lay aside his respectable reform journals and come and listen for long hours to the stark recitals of events of murder, lust and "white terror" as told by the black-skinned eye-witnesses. An intimate picture of this scourge can alone be obtained from Negroes. For ten million black inhabitants of the South, never a day dawns that is not clouded with the terror of "the Klan." It is the living embodiment of peonage, fiendish torture, and terrorization in every sphere of life.

This had not a little to do with everything else decided upon by the convention, including the question of the Republican party. Still invigilated with old memories of "the party of emancipation," the Negroes had anticipated their convention with a letter to President Coolidge asking him to state categorically his position in regard to the Ku Klux Klan. Coolidge had answered with a homily of campaign buncombe, without a mention of the Ku Klux Klan. If the little man in the White House only knew what a coward he made of himself in the eyes of those assembled Negroes! Snarling under the Republican convention's evasion, and then under the insult from Coolidge himself, the Negro convention sent an urgent appeal by telegraph to the LaFollette convention, as follows:

"The Fifteenth annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People does hereby express and record its unqualified protest at the action of the two major political parties in evading specific denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan by name.

"We urge the coming third party convention at Cleveland to seize this opportunity for courageous action by denouncing the Klan in unqualified terms and by appointing committees of the convention."

Both messages were utterly ignored by Mr. LaFollette's convention: "Yes, LaFollette, yes, LaFollette!" Mr. William H. Johnston as chairman would not permit the communications even to be read to the convention.

After its own convention was over the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sent its field organizer, William Pickens, to the Cleveland convention to see to the outcome of its requests. Mr. Pickens quite naturally asked a few minutes to address the convention. There was no obvious reason why he should not have been given the floor. The convention was a time-killing affair. The chairman was desperate, at times, to find a means of keeping the thing going while the committees were fixing up matters. Every possible "bunk-shooter," from sentimental small bankers to empty-headed society ladies, was imported to the platform to fill in the time between the singing of songs of personal eulogy of LaFollette. But when Chairman Johnston saw the mahogany face of Mr. Pickens, he merely promised the floor "at some time later on." Mr.

Gradually the economic interests of the capitalist class drew the Republican party into accepting and supporting the caste system as a useful and parallel reinforcement to the class system. The smug capitalist spokesman, Walter Francis Wilcox, writing in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, puts it this way:

"Neither the earlier system of slavery nor the governmental theory during the radical reconstruction period that race differences should be ignored has proved workable, and the trend is now toward some modus vivendi between these extremes." (Vol. 19, p. 346)

"Along with this decrease of pressure from without the southern states and the development of economic competition between the races within them, there has gone an increased demand on the part of the whites for a complete social separation between the races in school, in church, in public conveyances and hotels, all founded upon a fear that any disregard of such separativeness will make intermarriage or fruitful illegal unions between the races more frequent, in short, these developments are towards a more and more rigid caste system." (Vol. 19, p. 349—my emphases)

The industrial transformation of the South, successfully accomplishing the subjugation of the Negro on the new basis as a wage laborer and tenant-farmer, generated at last a philosophy of defeat, submission and hopelessness.

Mr. Booker T. Washington was the prophet of the period of submission. The public remembers Mr. Washington principally as "the Negro who once ate dinner with Roosevelt at the White House." But strange to say, that memorable show of "social equality" with the arch-dramatist Roosevelt, was an occasion marking the complete abdication of all claims for equality on the part of the Negro leadership. Mr. Washington was received as the already recognized spokesman for the Negro's surrender to the white ruling class as an inferior cog in the industrial machine. Dr. DuBois wrote:

"Mr. Washington distinctly asks that the black people give up, at least for the present, three things:

- "First, political power.
- "Second, insistence on civil rights.
- "Third, higher education of Negro youth—

and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South."

Dr. DuBois found that the result of fifteen years of Mr. Washington's leadership was:

- "1. The disfranchisement of the Negro
- "2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
- "3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro."

Mr. Washington died in the second year of the world war, just at the time when his leadership of the Negro world have had to die anyway.

The World War of 1914-1918 is almost as great a milestone in the life of the American Negro as the Civil War of 1861-1865. The experiences of mobilization stirred the black masses of the backward South into a new restlessness; then came the Klan terror; and at the same time the shutting off of the immigrant industrial labor supply from Europe sucked great floods of Negroes from the South into the north-



Adolph Dehn

The "Superior Caste"

ern industrial districts. Three-quarters of a million Negroes became for the first time urban industrial laborers. The migration turned the eyes of twelve millions toward industrial employment as "the way out." Out of it came every conceivable kind of impulse toward selfassertion of a race on the part of the Negro. The "New Negro" standing before the lynching mob with a gun in his hand, was one surprising new phenomenon. There was an acceleration of effort and jealous pride in business enterprises launched by Negroes, with renewed claims to loyalty to Negro business men who succeeded. An extensive cultural movement of literature, music and drama by Negro artists brought some remarkable results, at least by demonstrating that the Negro's genius in this direction is as good as the white man's.

Stirred to a new race-confidence and yet finding that the caste system followed them from the South to the North—there were born in the Negro a new determination and self-reliance for putting aside the Booker Washington compromise and demanding the abolition of the caste system in toto.

The new racial self-respect and quickened intelligence caused a distaste for the thin political mulligan of the Republican party's soup-kitchen, and a flash of understanding of the "gentlemen's agreement" of Republicans and Democrats for the defrauding of the simple black man.

The skeptical attitude on the part of the Negro intellectuals came just at the time that the Republican leaders began to feel the need of extending the Republican party among the ruling class of the South. As long as the Republican party was the "Nigger party," this could not be done. A strong "Lily-White" movement for confining the Republican party councils entirely to whites and making an appeal to the Southern aristocracy arose under the leadership of such men as C. Bascom Shlepp of Virginia.

In the campaign of 1924, the late President Harding felt impelled to go to Birmingham, Alabama, where he made his famous speech extolling himself as "uncompromisingly against every suggestion of social equality."

cannot co-exist with a free society. The Communist stands absolutely for equality of the Negro without reservations.

The World View.

The American Negro, if he wishes to add to his power to solve his people's problem, must let his eyes sweep a broader field than that of New York's Harlem and Chicago's South Side. He must look outward into a great world that is bursting with change. He will see impending transformations that surpass anything ever before known in the earth's history—changes in the world's race-adjustments greater than Attila or Genghis Khan ever knew.

The Negro who will replace his provincial view with a broad cosmopolitan outlook, will see a world of 1,750,000,000 people being ruled with force by a small and unstable minority. He will see that a vast majority of the world's population is made up of colored races, held under precarious control through the deceit, division and trickery of a small minority of supposedly superior white imperial powers.

He will see that a vast majority of the world's population—about 1,100,000,000—are peoples more or less marked with color, and all held under subjection of a white-skinned minority which was until recently, about 650,000,000 in number. Of this minority he will see that about 150,000,000 have recently split away from the imperialist camp (in the Russian revolution), reversing position and joining as the most militant partisans the camp of the suppressed races struggling for liberation. Thus we have about 4,250,000,000 of the world's 1,750,000,000 population definitely or potentially linked up with the cause of the liberation of all races and the establishment of full race equality for black, white, yellow and brown races throughout the world without distinction. The one and three-quarter billions are face-to-face with their tyrants who number only a half-billion. It is a ratio of three and a half to one in favor of the darker races. And within each of the imperialist nations is the working-class revolutionary Communist movement which is destined to lead the masses within those imperialist nations against their ruling classes.

The World Center for Suppressed Peoples.

The forces for liberation of the darker peoples have, since the Russian revolution, naturally gravitated to a cultural center in the capital of the one country where alone they cannot be reached by the police-arm of the enemy they plan to vanquish. At this moment, one of Britain's many propagandists, Sir Valentine Chirol, is touring the United States trying to prepare this country to line up for the side of White Supremacy in the oncoming world-clash. "Bolshevism," he said in a lecture in Chicago, "has poured forth over the whole of Central Asia like a devastating flood." (Devastating to white European imperialist rule over the "inferior" peoples of Asia.) He continues: "On November 2, 1917, Lenin issued a decree proclaiming for all peoples, and not for all Oriental peoples, the right of self-determination. But when Moscow began to organize its vast system of Bolshevik propaganda it was nowhere more active than in Central Asia. In 1920 a Communist University of Workers in the East was founded in Moscow . . . and branches were soon opened at Tashkent, Baku and Irkutsk. Reaching the sootiest spot of his lament—the vast empire of India whose 284,000,000 people are the beasts of burden for

the British ruling class—Sir Valentine wails that in India "the trade unions, which are springing up like mushrooms, are mainly in the hands of professional agitators who might almost have themselves graduated at Moscow," for Moscow boasts of the special attention devoted in its various Oriental colleges to the training of Bolshevik "missionaries" with the requisite knowledge to rouse, as its organ, the Noy Vostok (New East) puts it, "the whole colonial world of the oppressed, not only in Asia, but in Africa and America against the capitalistic society of Europe and the United States."

The alarmed gentleman continued:

"All the manifold discontents of the Orient are bound up together in the clash of color . . . in America you have the color problem in your very midst; you have it again at your doors in the shape of Asiatic immigration. We in Europe are confronted, along the great borderland of the Occident and the Orient extending through Northern Africa and across Western and Central Asia, from the Northwest-Atlantic to the shores of the Indian Ocean, and even beyond."

The Negro Center of Culture.

In the midst of this world situation, the American Negro is placed in a position of peculiar responsibility. For America is the cultural center of the great Black group among these submerged colored races. America, as the cultural center of the Negro world, must be called upon to furnish the intellectual leaders of the Negro people of the entire world.

Of course, it is possible for the American Negro intellectual to play an entirely opposite role. The American ruling class will have plenty of use for "handkerchief-folds" among Negro intellectuals during the stirring struggles for liberation that are coming. Denmark Vesey, together with his thirty-four brave lieutenants, was "turned up" to the master of the "big house" by a household servant of his own race. Just so today, there are many Negroes with the immense advantage of education who find it easy to say "We love American institutions," of which one of the most important is "White Supremacy"—the caste system.

But there is little question that Negro intellectual leadership is being developed.

The Answer

I WAS alone, at last, with God
And I spoke to Him face to face
Why have you set a curse
A curse on the black man's race.

Why must he carry the cross
Why must he kiss the rod
Answer me here and now
Thus did I speak with God.

God answered me not at all
I waited for Him to smite
The silence was worse than speech
Then I saw that God was WHITE.

Ruth Loomis Skeebs.