

International Workers Order In the South

By TOM JOHNSON.

RECENT events in District Seventeen have clearly shown the necessity of clarifying once and for all the fundamental policies of the I. W. O. and in particular the stand of the Southern Branches of this organization on the Negro question.

The International Workmans Order is not based on the Jewish workers in the South. Almost without exception its members are grocery store owners or petty business men of one type or another. Many of these people are former members of the Party who have dropped out in the natural process of elimination of dead wood as the struggle grew sharper. There is no Jewish proletariat in the South and in consequence the activities of the I.W.O. are entirely based on the small shop keepers.

For years these left wing petty bourgeois elements have quietly vegetated in their isolated branches in the South. Then in the early part of this year the Party for the first time undertook serious work in this section of the South. The I.W.O. Branches welcomed the Party organizers with open arms. They took a new lease on life and dug deep in their pockets to provide the Party with funds. In this district two branches of the I.W.O. raised since March close to \$1,000 for the defense of class war prisoners.

As the work of the Party progressed and new sections of the workers were brought under our influence, by far the majority of them Negroes, the Negro question inevitably arose in a rather sharp manner. As early as last March this question came up in the Chattanooga Branch of the I.W.O. in connection with the presence of a Negro organizer of the T.U.U.L. in the I. W. O. hall. At once a howl of protest came from a section of the membership—"their business would be ruined—the hall would be raided by police—they would be hounded out of town if it were found that Negroes frequented their hall"—such were the arguments used. The Party fraction in the I.W.O. took a firm and correct stand on this issue and after a bitter fight a motion was passed stating that the I.W.O. welcomed Negroes in their hall at all times. This would seem to have disposed of the issue but events were soon to prove that this was a paper face-saving decision only.

In Atlanta the same question came to the fore in all its sharpness only when the I.W.O. Branch arranged an affair for the International Labor Defense to raise funds for the Atlanta Six, and announced that no Negroes would be allowed to attend the affair in their hall. The representative of the Jewish Section of the I.L.D. promptly refused to speak at this kind of Jim Crow meeting and the chauvinists were forced to beat a temporary retreat. But not for long. They then proposed that no meeting be held but only a quiet little "social" be arranged, and the question of Negroes being present be dropped by common consent. The I.L.D. representatives and the two Party members at that time members of the I.W.O. in Atlanta weakly agreed to this "compromise" and the "social" was held—with no Negroes present. The Party fraction was sharply criticized for this unpardonable lack of principle and instructed to bring this issue to a head and settle it once and for all. At the present writing this has not been

done and this question still remains to be threshed out.

In Chattanooga the paper decision of the Branch remained in the minutes book and no objection was made to the very occasional presence of a Negro comrade at the meetings and lectures of the I.W.O. Branch. Then the Chattanooga Branch of the I.L.D. came before the I.W.O. with a request for use of their hall for a basket party to raise funds for the Atlanta cases and to build the I.L.D. Branch. Immediately the question came up, "Will Negroes attend the affair?" On being informed that every effort would be made to have Negroes present and participating in the affair, the chauvinists jumped into action. The same old arguments were advanced and a long fight took place. The struggle was finally settled in typical opportunist fashion by evading the issue altogether, and by deciding that inasmuch as the I.W.O. is willing to rent their hall to any organization, they will allow the I.L.D. to use it. At the same time the I.W.O. carefully refrained from endorsing the meeting or calling on their own members to attend, and by implication at least, showed clearly that most of the members will not attend the affair.

The basis of this chauvinism is of course clear. It arises from the bad social composition of these branches which contain hardly one actual worker and from the fact that due to the absence of a Jewish proletariat in the South the whole prospective of the I.W.O. branches for future work and for increasing their influence and membership is one of work among the petty bourgeois Jewish elements. They realize quite clearly that these elements will be antagonized by a revolutionary stand on the Negro question and they are quite ready to compromise principle in order to maintain and strengthen the position of their branches in this strata of the population.

The Party fractions in the I.W.O. have somewhat contributed to this bad situation by bad tactics. In some instances the fractions have been stamped into taking a weak position due to the pressure of the chauvinists. In other instances the Party members, relatively inexperienced in fraction work, have incorrectly put the question as if the Party line were something coming from outside the I.W.O. to be arbitrarily imposed on the membership with or without their consent. There has been insufficient effort made to show the members of the I.W.O. that the practice of social equality with the Negro workers is not some mysterious decision of the Party which the Party is determined to force on the I.W.O. membership, but that it is the only correct revolutionary line for any organization which bases itself on the principles of the class struggle—that only through the firm application of this revolutionary line can the I. W. O. grow and become in actual fact an International Workmans Order contributing its bit to the destruction of capitalism and the emancipation of the working class.

The I.W.O. membership must be made to realize that one of the fundamental problems of the revolution, not only in the South but in all America, is how best to break down the racial barriers the bourgeoisie has erected between the races. They must realize that it is the primary duty, not only of the Communists

and his speech did him no good. over M. W. B. Co. the nec- sign- ture sim- A. tee ch- ing- gain- to

MR. FISH—"How many Negroes are there in the Communist Party in the South?" MILLER—"About 100,000, I should say." (Poor Fish. Here he had been giving statements to the Press that the Negro in the South had absolutely nothing to do with the "damn Reds," that they were good Christian folk, and now every witness testified that 75 percent of our movement was composed of Negro workers.)

FISH—"Isn't it a fact that the Negroes are too patriotic, and love their country too much to listen to the Reds?"

MILLER—"The Communist is preaching for better living conditions and the Negro wants to listen to him."

FISH—"But the Negroes are a religious race and the Communists don't believe in God. Surely the Negroes won't stand for that."

MILLER—"The Negroes will do anything, no matter what it is to get a better living wage."

FISH—"Are the Communists making any headway among the Negroes now?"

MILLER—"They surely is. They is distributed lots of Southern Workers and other literature and the message of the Communist Party is carried in the bosom of the Negroes of Atlanta."

FISH (Very embarrassed, to newspapermen)—From evidence I received in other titles it appeared the influence among the Negroes was negligible. (This is a lie, because at the hearings in Chattanooga and Birmingham it was continually brought out that the largest percentage of our influence in the South was among the Negroes.)

The police department showed by its testimony during the entire hearing by actually overestimating our influence among the Negroes, a desire to give the impression that the insurrection charges against the Atlanta Six was well founded. Mr. Fish, on the other hand sought to prove that "although propaganda had been spread among the Negroes, the Communist Party has made very little headway among that group, as they are essentially patriotic and loyal to the government, its institutions and to the American Flag."

Those present at the hearing were the investigating committee, a few newspapermen, a few dicks and cops, and two Communists. The Communists were in very poor company. The Fish committee became quite informal—they spit tobacco, lolled around, and among other things, Representative Elish found time to flirt with one of the Communists. Mr. Nelson wore the usual red carnation.

Special emphasis was put on the fact that Powers was of Jewish origin, and the fact that the arrested organizers came from the North.

Deportation and criminal syndicalist laws are twins; elect delegates to the National Conference for the Protection of Foreign Born, Nov. 30, Dec. 1st, Washington, D. C.

but of all revolutionary workers, to smash through this racial wall of the bourgeoisie at all points and on all occasions. The IWO members must realize that it is not the Negro workers, but precisely the white workers, who must lead the assault—must force the first breaches in this wall between black and white—that it is the revolutionary white workers who must demonstrate in actual practice their contempt for the Jim Crow laws and institutions of the white ruling class and must by their precept and example prove conclusively to the masses of the Negroes that the slogan of full social, political and economic equality for the Negroes is not an abstract slogan, but a revolutionary slogan of struggle around which can and must be mobilized the white and Negro workers for militant struggle against the white bourgeoisie.