

THE WORLD CRISIS AND THE NEGRO WORKERS

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(For the International Conference of Negro Workers, July 1st)

THE first international conference of Negro workers to be held in July this year, is an event of vast significance for the entire world labor movement. A new army is joining in the general struggle against capital and imperialism. Fresh millions of toilers, doubly exploited by capital, brutally oppressed as workers and Negroes, are awakening to new life.

The conference will be the new manifestation and organizational formulation of this action of the new, powerful division, on the arena of the great international struggle for the emancipation of the toilers.

The peculiarities of the present international situation make the significance of the conference, and the perspective for the Negro Workers' movement still greater. The world economic crisis, which at the present time is spreading like the plague from one capitalist country to another, has especially affected the three regions where the Negro population are concentrated. The United States, where there are twelve million Negroes, is passing through a most acute crisis, and unemployment is rampant. In the Northern states, where hundreds of thousands of Negroes work at the factories, plants and mines, the ever-deepening industrial crisis is leading to attempts by capital to greatly intensify the exploitation of labor. The Negro workers are often the first victims of unemployment, wage cuts, speed-up. And as, on the one hand, their working conditions formerly were considerably worse than those of the white workers, and on the other hand, it is absolutely hopeless for them to think of going back to the farms in the South, they have nothing else to do, no other hope for ridding themselves of the unbearable oppression, than the determined, heroic class struggle. The Negroes in the South, where the greater part of the Negro population of the U. S. A. is concentrated, in the overwhelming majority are tenant farmers, share croppers and agricultural workers. Their existence depends chiefly upon cotton cultivation. The world economic crisis, however, has given rise to an acute "over-production" of cotton, to decreased demand, lowered costs. The Federal Reserve Bureau is carrying out a campaign to restrict the area under cotton cultivation. Both the cotton crisis and all the measures taken by the government to overcome it affect first and foremost the Negro population of the South.

Negro Movement Powerful Revolutionary Factor.

The cutting down of the area under cotton, the transfer of the basic cotton districts to the West—in Texas and Oklahoma, the commencement of widespread mechanization of the working up of cotton—all this threatens to squeeze out completely the millions of Negro tenant farmers, share croppers and agricultural workers, and portends unheard of intensification by the exploitation for those who remain on the farms. Millions of Negroes employed in agriculture in the Southern states lived even before the crisis in semi-slave conditions. The slave owners and finance capital, the cotton speculators, the middlemen, the merchants, government officials, etc., suck the life blood of the Negro workers like leeches. The greatly worsened position of the Southern Negroes, resultant upon the crisis, is overfilling their cup of patience, and bringing the oppression and exploitation to the limit, beyond which there inevitably commences the spontaneous protest and desperate struggle. Thus, despite the thousands of obstacles, despite the veritable "white terror" against all attempts at action on the part of the toiling Negroes, the "legal" punishment and lynchings, despite the corrupting influence of the church, the press and a considerable section of the Negro intellectuals, the Negro movement in the United States is becoming a powerful revolutionary factor.

Another region of concentration for Negroes—the West Indies—has likewise been very strongly affected by the world economic crisis. The "overproduction" of sugar, coffee, and a number of other colonial products is a veritable catastrophe of the entire economy of Cuba, Jamaica, Porto Rico, and other islands in the

Caribbeans. The crisis is throwing hundreds of thousands of Negroes out of the plantations, and they have nowhere to go to. Those who remain, on the most unbearable conditions, working 12 hours a day under the scorching tropical sun, have to suffer cuts in their already low wages, which do not suffice to make ends meet. Predatory American imperialism, as though in compensation for its limited colonial possessions, is not satisfied with the stupendous dividends, and demands more and more contributions. Bribing the local bourgeoisie and the mock-presidents with crumbs off its table, American imperialism is striving to transfer the entire burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the workers. The uprisings in Haiti and San Domingo, the mass strike in Cuba, were replies of the toilers of the West Indies to the capitalist offensive. The Negro workers played a most prominent part in these last moves in the heroic struggle.

Finally, Africa—the "Black Continent," which during the world war supplied echelons of cannon fodder for its British and French masters.

But a few years ago the very idea of a labor movement in Africa and action of the Negro masses against imperialism seemed to the European bourgeoisie to be a joke. Times have changed, however. The submissive Negro slave could be treated formerly worse than cattle, they could be driven far from home into compounds surrounded by barbed-wire barriers, they could be forced to work from morn to night for nothing, under the whip of the overseers, and they were exterminated by the thousands, each mile of new railway being bedded with human bones, all in the name of civilization and progress. These slaves, however, have awakened, and desire no longer to remain slaves. The uprisings and unrest in South Africa and Nigeria, in the Belgian Congo and in French Equatorial Africa, are but the first gathering of the clouds for the storm that is brewing. The ground in Africa too is beginning to burn under the feet of the imperialists. The economic crisis is greatly hastening the awakening of the Negro masses of Africa. From Cairo to Cape Town, from Sierra Leone and Matadi to Uganda and Durban, the entire Black Continent at the present time is feeling the effects of the crisis. The mining industry in South Africa is being restricted, stocks of unsold agricultural products and wool are piling up. The Belgian Congo is passing through a deep going crisis; the British colonies in Western Africa, Kenya, and Uganda are in the same position. The upheaval on the world market has spread even to the most far-flung parts of Equatorial Africa. Everywhere it results in the ruin of the Negro population and sharp intensification of imperialist oppression, and in the spontaneous movements among the natives.

No efforts of the imperialists, no attempts to drown the first movements of the Negro masses in rivers of blood, will be able to stop the development of their struggle. On the contrary, this will only pour oil onto the fire, which will burn up still more brightly and strongly. In this setting the International Conference of Negro workers will be of world-wide importance. For the first time, under its auspices, the representatives of the toiling Negro workers from all corners of the earth will be brought together, it will draw up the tasks, methods of organization, objects; it will link up the struggle of the Negro toilers with the struggle of the toilers in Europe, America, and the Asiatic colonies, with the international organizations of the revolutionary proletariat. The disunited outbreaks of the spontaneous struggle will develop into class conscious, stubborn, systematic work to organize the Negro masses against capital, against race oppression, against imperialist wars. Already now considerable strata of Negro workers are becoming the vanguard of still greater sections of the black agricultural population who are exploited by capital to a no less extent than the workers. The tasks and perspectives of the conference are colossal.

A new fire will burn up from this small spark, which in the very near future will make itself felt for world imperialism.