

First International Conference of Negro Workers

By V. CHATTOPADHYAYA.

THE idea of an international conference of Negro workers was first mooted at the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism, held in July, 1929, at Frankfurt-am-Main, where among the 400 odd delegates that came from all parts of the world there were a number of Negro delegates from Africa and America, besides various non-Negro delegates directly interested in the organization of the Negro masses for the struggle against imperialism.

Reports Submitted.

The reports submitted to that Congress on the conditions of life of the Negro masses under British, French, Belgian, Portuguese and American imperialist exploitation showed clearly:

(1) That there was a considerable similarity in those conditions in the various African colonies.

(2) That the Negro workers in the various colonies were isolated from one another and from the workers of other countries.

(3) That the vast Negro masses were completely unorganized.

(4) That they were being politically misled and deceived for the benefit of the capitalists and imperialists by Garveyism, pan-Africanism, national reformism and trade union reformism.

It was felt that it was essential to undertake the organization, particularly the trade union organization, of the Negro workers, the co-ordination on an international scale, and the organization of the anti-imperialist struggle of the Negroes on a class basis as against the racial nationalism that was being preached by black capitalists and agents of imperialism.

In order to achieve these ends, a Provisional International Committee of Negro Workers was constituted under the chairmanship of James W. Ford, national organizer of the Trade Union Unity League, U. S. A., and it was resolved to convene an international conference on July 1, 1930, to take place in London, the metropolis of the largest slave empire of the world.

"Labor" Government Closes Door.

But at this critical moment the profits and privileges of the British slave-drivers are being carefully protected by the "labor" government and the organizers of the conference were informed on May 21 that his majesty's government would not allow the conference to be held in London.

The organizers then decided to hold the conference in Hamburg, where, after unavoidable delays, occasioned by the change in its venue, it was opened on July 7. There were delegates, including a woman, from seven important unions in the United States of

America (miners, railway workers, needle trades, etc.) and delegates from Jamaica, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and from the former German colony of Cameroon, as well as a white delegate from the South African Negro workers' organizations.

Owing to the absence of representation from the French colonies, from East Africa, from the Belgian and Portuguese territories, and from the Latin-American countries, it was obvious that this first meeting of Negro workers was more a preparatory conference, the political importance of which is none the less very considerable. The very fact that such a conference was held and the clear line of policy and action laid down in the resolutions are bound to have a strong influence upon the development of the struggle.

Conference Agenda.

The agenda of the conference included all the important aspects of the problem. After messages of solidarity had been personally delivered by the fraternal delegates of the League Against Imperialism and the International Red Aid, and letters and telegrams had been read from the Red International of Labor Unions, from the Red Sport International, from the Proletarian Congress of Labor, Manila, etc., a comprehensive report on the work of the International Committee during the eleven months of its existence was made by James W. Ford, showing the great difficulties met with in getting into touch with the Negro workers in most parts of Africa, as well as the successes achieved by the organizers in the short time at their disposal.

The various delegates dealt with the conditions of the Negro workers in their respective countries, special interest attaching to the report made by Small on behalf of the Bathurst Trade Union, which had conducted a valiant fight at the end of the last year against the Margarine Combine.

A very clear and instructive statement was made by George Padmore of the Negro Trade Union Committee of the R. I. L. U., on the "Economic struggles and tasks of the Negro workers."

He summed up the effects of imperialist exploitation on the condition of the Negro masses; pointed out that the mass struggles of the millions of super-exploited Negroes in Africa and America against the imperialist offensive (South Africa, Nigeria, Gambia, Equatorial Africa, Haiti, the West Indies and the U. S. A.) coincided with the revolt of other colonial peoples (India, Indo-China, etc.) and with the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the capitalist countries; warned the workers against the national repression of the Negro middle class and intelligentsia; drew attention to the increasingly favorable objective condi-

tions of the Federation are openly refusing to organize the unorganized workers and are proposing that the union members give up all the hard-won benefits of organization. This program means that the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers declares itself bankrupt as a labor organization and becomes a company union.

Scarcely was the convention closed when the officials set to work feverishly to have the new sell-out agreement pushed through the locals of the Federation, so that it can go into effect on September 1, when the old agreement terminates. The officialdom is so much stricken with fear that the rank and file will take matters into its own hands that they are ever plotting to have the new agreement go into effect before the old one terminates. One of the measures taken at the convention to prevent a strike was the enactment of a decision that after July 15 no more strike payments whatsoever will be given by the Federation. The misleaders have developed into open strikebreakers. Very significant is the part played by the Musteites at this convention of the union which is their main base in the labor movement. The Musteites, who assume the role of "progressive opposition" to the fascist A. F. of L., capitulated submissively to the A. F. of L. officials and helped Well and McMahon push the new agreement through the convention. Yet, in spite of this black united front of the two brands of misleaders, the pressure of the rank and file was felt so strongly in the convention that the agreement passed only by a per capita vote of 61 to 21.

They Must Fight.

There can no longer be any doubt that the hosiery workers, especially in the famous Kensington textile region of Philadelphia which is the main center of the hosiery industry and the largest textile center in the country, mean to fight this Fall. Together with the textile

workers in the development of working class leadership, and sketched the outlines of a program for the revolutionary organization of the millions of toiling peasants. These facts were incorporated in a resolution that was unanimously adopted.

Patterson, of the American Negro Labor Congress, made an appeal for a more "vigorous struggle against forced labor and poll tax." He warned the Negro workers against the legislative illusions deliberately created by the League of Nations and the International Labor Office and called upon them to resort to direct action to recover their lands, refuse to pay taxes or rent, repudiate indentures, to fight against the "pass" and the "compound" system, to fight against their tribal chiefs who are agents of imperialism, etc.

Very important at the present moment is the resolution on the "War Danger and its significance to the Negro masses," presented by Macaulay of the National Democratic Party of Nigeria. After pointing out how black troops have been used for decades as cannon fodder by the imperialist powers and how they have even been employed to crush the revolutionary movement of the workers in the im-

perialist countries, the resolution shows the growing danger of war and of an imperialist attack on the Soviet Union. It points out that "in case of such an attack it is the task of all Negro toilers to struggle on the side of the Soviet Union against the imperialists."

Special resolutions were passed against lynching, against the white terror in Alabama (U. S. A.), protesting against the MacDonald government for refusing permission to hold the conference in London and against the South African and other governments for refusal to grant passports.

A new International Committee was elected, consisting of James W. Ford (U.S.A.), I. Hawkins (U.S.A.), George Padmore (U.S.A.), G. Reid (West Indies), F. Macaulay (Nigeria), G. Small (Gambia), Albert Nula (South Africa), Kouyate (French West Africa). Representatives of Haiti, Liberia and East Africa are to be added.

During the proceedings, a delegation of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (Trade Union Opposition) arrived in the hall and were warmly greeted by the Negro delegates, while on the second day there was a crowded

meeting of Hamburg workers who extended an enthusiastic welcome to the Negro delegates a few of whom spoke at the meeting. The conference which was marked throughout by enthusiasm lasted three days and ended fittingly with the singing of the Internationale. An official invitation was extended to the delegates to proceed to Moscow to attend the Fifth World Congress of the R. I. L. U. as guests. Eleven delegates have already accepted the invitation. Those who were unable to do so have sent the fraternal greetings of their organizations to the congress.

By ANNA ROCHESTER,
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MINE workers in the Soviet Union benefit as do all others in the workers' republic. Their freedom is a startling contrast to the mine worker's life in the capitalist United States. Every worker who has been in the Soviet Union knows that recent charges in the American capitalist press claiming that Russian coal is mined by "convict or forced labor" are nothing but capitalist propaganda against Soviet Russia.

Only six hours a day underground, security from haunting fears of unemployment, accident, illness or old age, membership in the Mine Workers' Union, to which all mine workers belong—these conditions make the Soviet miner a free and self-respecting worker in the first socialist state. Miners' representatives through the union are part of the management in the industry. The Mine Workers' Union is a free social association, an organ of the same class that controls the state. Miners' representatives sit on central boards and departments of the workers' government.

A miner works six hours a day underground and the time is reckoned from bank to bank. That is, from the time he leaves the mine mouth until he returns. In contrast to these hours, underground workers in American coal mines have an eight, nine or ten-hour day of time spent at the working face, in addition to traveling time underground. In Soviet mines the working day is still further reduced in wet or otherwise bad places to five or even four hours from bank to bank.

Month's Vacation With Pay.

Underground workers in the Soviet Union receive a month's vacation with full pay every year. Surface workers enjoy a two weeks' vacation, also with full pay. In cases of sickness or accident, when a worker is unable to work, he is given his full pay and all his medical attention free during the time he is off. If he is so ill that he has to stay in the hospital, he is cared for free of charge, and in

addition he receives 75 per cent of his regular wage if he is married and 50 per cent if he is single.

Every producing organization or mine pays annually a sum equal to about 15 per cent of the total payroll for these forms of social insurance, including the free medical service, sick benefit funds, unemployment and old age insurance. Such social insurance for mine workers is unknown in capitalist United States.

Housing is free for workers in the Soviet coal fields, or the charge for rent is so small as to be merely a nominal payment. Electric light, fuel and other municipal services are entirely free. Working clothes, boots, tools, caps, etc., are supplied free of charge or at a very low rate. Restaurants subsidized by the administration supply food at low prices. Clubs, nurseries and schools are also supported by the administration. The Workers' Club, for instance, at Stalin Coal Mines in the Donetz Basin, is a fine modern building, with many large windows giving light and air in the halls and recreation rooms.

Even conservatively estimated, these additional benefits received by Soviet miners amount to no less than 50 per cent of their money wages. This brings the average daily wages for face miners to six rubles (\$3) a day, or about 50 cents an hour. Contrasted with the terrible uncertainty of unemployment, part time work and illness in American mines, this regular wage makes the Soviet miner a free man.

Every miner in the Soviet Union belongs to the Mine Workers' Union. He cannot be discharged from the mine without due cause. Often workers who have been discharged are reinstated by the union in cases that a board member here would have no chance of winning. The miner gets his job through the free government employment agency. Upon giving due notice a mine worker in the Soviet Union is free to leave his job at any time. Final authority in the workers' republic rests with the rank and file workers.

was a marked difference between the Negroes from the United States who are industrial workers with completely proletarian psychology and outlook, and the delegates from Africa who have more of the mentality of the small farmer. The conditions of the problem in Africa necessitate different methods and tactics from those in the U. S. A., and there may be a tendency for the Negro workers from the U. S. A. to look at the African Negro question too much from the American point of view. Nevertheless it is a gain to the African worker to come into contact with the representatives of the far more advanced Negro proletariat of America. This contact has been achieved by the conference.

American Negroes Most Clear.

There is one observation that deserves to be recorded regarding the Negro Conference. There