

# The Negro Workers' Role in Past May Day Struggles

By SIMON WILLIAMSON

All class-conscious workers, black and white, will parade on May 1 in commemoration of the heroic martyrs of labor, who in 1886 were framed by the capitalist class because of their activities in the struggle for the eight-hour day.

According to the records of John W. Hayes, then general secretary of the Knights of Labor, there were over 60,000 Negroes who were members of his organization and were actively engaged in the struggle for this eight-hour day. Their militancy and solidarity in all the conflicts of their fellow workers during the short-lived period of the knights, is one of the outstanding events of the labor movement.

In the Knights of Labor's Convention of 1886, a year before the Chicago revolt, Negroes responded so willingly to the stirring appeal of labor that it was proposed that a Negro organizer be appointed for each of the old slave states. However, this request was referred to the executive board. At the following Convention, in 1886, the general secretary reported that "rapid strides have been made in the South, especially in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama. The colored people of the South are flocking to us, being eager for organization and education, and when thoroughly imbued with our principles are answering in their idleness."

However, since 1886, the labor movement has met many set-backs in the organization of Negro workers. This has been partly due to the bad tactics of the American Federation of Labor, which propagated craft unionism and racial superiority of the white workers over the blacks, and in turn brought about a line of demarcation between skilled and unskilled labor and divided the blacks from the whites. These methods of the A. F. of L. only played into the hands of the capitalist class. This further led to the encouragement of the racial prejudice that the white workers have inherited from the semi-feudalistic system of the old Bourbon South and intensified great mistrust for the whites among the blacks. And in further consequence of these policies of the A. F. of L., it is much more difficult to rally

Negro labor around the banner of the class struggle today than during the Reconstruction Period that followed the Civil War, when the American Federation of Labor had not yet gained prominence.

Nevertheless, despite the setbacks the American labor movement has met in organizing the black proletariat, it is cutting some inroads into this unexplored reservoir of untouched militancy. And as a result of these gains a few thousand Negroes are going to participate in the coming May Day events.

There is no doubt about it: the Negro worker is the hardest hit in the present capitalist crisis; and his precarious lot is rapidly crystallizing his racial consciousness into a class-consciousness. He is, moreover, beginning to see in the white worker, whom he regarded in the past as a foe, a comrade and class brother suffering under the same oppression that can be eradicated only by the unity of the two.

More and more May Day is revivifying the old tradition of the American labor movement of 1886. Then we struggled for the eight-hour day—today we are struggling for the six-hour day and the five-day week. Negro labor is also struggling for this, as well as for an additional demand. Its extra demand is for full social, economic and political equality. Under this special demand hangs such subordinate demands as equal pay for equal work, no discrimination because of race, color or previous conditions of servitude, better educational facilities and complete abolition of lynching, etc.

Since the victory of the eight-hour day the labor movement in America has passed through a period of reaction and defeat.

On the shoulders of the Haymarket martyrs and their continuators through the years a new revolutionary structure is being created, tested and grounded in the experiences of the great revolutionary thinkers of the world, especially the experiences of Marx and Engels. This edifice is the newly organized Workers Party of the United States—the harbinger of the Fourth International.

Negro and white workers! Unite under the leadership of this new revolutionary party of America. You have nothing to lose but your oppression—your chains!

# Huey Long--Workers' Enemy

### Share - the - Wealth Can Only Mean Share - the - Poverty As Long as the Capitalist System Endures

By ARNE SWABECK

From the state of Louisiana, where he boldly boasts of holding in the hollow of his hands "the finest collection of law-makers money can buy," Huey P. Long has now definitely entered the scene of national politics. He has the old line capitalist politician's worried. They stand against, watching with anticipation and fear the prospects of traditional party lines again being broken down and this time by a high pressure demagogue.

But—and this is important—Huey's grandiose promises to "Share our Wealth" and his demagogic appeals addressed to the common people have made deep inroads also in the politically unconscious working class layers.

**Out for Bigger Things**

Undoubtedly Huey Long's hat will be in the ring for next year's presidential elections. He is a candidate for leadership in the formation of a new third party. It is reported that he has already, together with Father Coughlin and Governor Olson of Minnesota, accepted an invitation issued by Alvin Karpis, for the Farm Holiday Association, to attend a conference, to be held in Des Moines, Iowa May 7, to consider the formation of such a party.

Huey Long is the most spectacular and probably also the strongest of the candidates for leadership of such a party. Fortified already by his undisputed control of the state of Louisiana, he is reaching out for immediate political control of other southern states and apparently enjoying the undivided support of such a staunch defender of the "rights of the people" as Governor Tamworth of Georgia, who declared martial law in his state during the national textile strike and put the strikers wholesale into concentration camps.

This example is typical of the make-up and political coloring of the Huey Long forces. They are taking on the form of a movement, 27,331 Share Our Wealth Clubs with a membership of 4,684,000 have been organized, he claims.

**Long as Roosevelt Supporter**

Huey Long began his national political career as a Roosevelt supporter. To the Chicago convention that nominated him for President in 1932, Roosevelt spoke, declaring: "Throughout the nation men and women . . . look to us for guidance and for more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of national wealth." To the delegates those words were just empty rhetoric, noble sounding sentiments that did not at all have to be taken seriously, least of all literally. But Huey Long noted the power of the phrase, snapped it up as his own and is now making this the central point of his program while campaigning against the government of "alphabet wreckers and spoliars."

He proposes to cut down all large fortunes by a capital levy tax to a point where no one person may own more than from three to four million dollars and have a yearly income of not more than one million dollars. The surplus of all these big fortunes is to go into the United States Treasury. This is to be done by the simple process of issuing a questionnaire for all the plutocrats to list their fortunes at their own appraisal and to state in what sort of holdings they wish to

retain their three to four millions. By his calculation he has arrived at a surplus already available on paper of \$165,000,000,000 to \$175,000,000,000. This surplus he will distribute to all families owning less than \$5,000, free of debt, so that each family may have at least that amount. This he says will take no more than \$100,000,000,000, leaving a handsome balance to spare. By means of the balance he proposes to provide for the reduction of the hours of labor so that all may be employed and have a yearly income for each family of not less than \$2,500. In addition he will also provide for a college education for all youth, for old age pensions and he proposes to care for agricultural production in the manner specified in the bible.

Huey Long himself claims that his proposals originate from the unfulfilled Roosevelt program. Similar to the Roosevelt New Deal program, the Long proposals have as their base the maintenance and strengthening of the system of capitalism but with a supposed increase of the purchasing power of the masses of the people. However, the Huey Long edition appears in a much more radical dress. "I believe in capitalism," exclaims Long, "but you cannot stimulate it unless there is buying power. You've got to have a foundation under the house, and that is a more even distribution of wealth."

**Huey's Discovery**

Oh yes, capitalism is again to have its "abuses" corrected. To substantiate his claims, the Kingfish refers very pretentiously to what he sees as the present social injustices and economic maladjustments. And surely, there is in the present situation of mass misery, deprivation and despair on the one hand together with the enormous concentration of wealth on the other hand, sufficient material for an unscrupulous demagogue to appear as the saviour Angel. But it did not require a Huey Long to make this discovery. Nor is he the first demagogue that has appeared on the political scene.

The Roosevelt program for increasing the purchasing power of the masses has so far brought us to the promised magnificent social security for some of the unemployed at \$50.00 a month maximum which in turn allows all present wage standards to be torn down to that level. Where would the Huey Long program lead to? Needless to say, in this proposed redistribution of wealth we have a repetition of petty bourgeois utopias advanced elsewhere and at other times.

**Ownership Determines Distribution**

That wealth exists in this country in abundance is well known and was known before Huey Long said so. But the distribution of this wealth proceeds according to the social relations of society. These are capitalist relations, resting upon the capitalist ownership and control of the means of production. In the Kingfish's plan these relations would remain, only the wealth would be redistributed by cutting down on the big fortunes and adding to the small ones or giving to those that have none. But this is impossible under capitalism since the ownership and control of the means of production determines the form of distribution of all wealth. So far this has meant and can only mean ever greater riches for the parasites and ever greater impoverishment for those who toil, who have nothing but their labor power to sell—and to sell only when the bosses see fit to buy.

What is the cause of this condition; what is the cause of this unequal distribution of wealth? The cause is to be found in the ownership and control of the means of production. This system secures the right to exploit labor by leaving in the hands of the capitalist class also the ownership of the surplus value produced by the laborer over and above what he receives as wages. This is how profits are acquired. Moreover, under the conditions of mass production, and in order to continue the process of production. In other words, sufficient only for their bare upkeep when they have jobs. Of course, the abundance of wealth available could easily guarantee to each family, as Huey Long proposes, a yearly income of \$2,500. But this is equally impossible under the profit system and it can be obtained only when the profit system is abolished.

**For Maintenance of System**

Huey Long proclaims in grandiose style for the redistribution of wealth; but he is equally vociferous in his proclamations for the maintenance of the present social relationship. His program assumes the continuation of the right to exploitation, however, with an increase of the purchasing power of the masses so that returns to bondholders in the form of unearned income may continue; so that dividends on watered stocks may be paid and the flow of profits taken out of the exploitation of labor may proceed uninterrupted. There are no other sources for profits to come from.

What is this but the stabilization of the system of exploitation? To stabilize the system of exploitation means to stabilize the economic power of the class that owns and controls the means of production. Furthermore, it is well to remember that political relations are governed by this economic power which is another way of saying that those who own are also those who rule. They use their economic power to build up their political state, to build up their government and to reinforce it by courts, by police and by military forces, always ready to be used against the workers when on strike or in other forms of struggle and on a whole serving for the purpose of keeping the masses in subjection. This government, Huey Long proposes to entrust with the redistribution of wealth.

They will not consent to any redistribution of their wealth acquired by exploitation without a fierce struggle. They will not even permit the workers to organize into unions so as to obtain a living wage without the most stubborn resistance. They will not yield their economic power, as represented by their accumulated wealth, or give up their privilege to exploit labor without a life and death struggle. Nay more, they use this economic power to determine who can be elected to the public offices and to dictate the program of those so elected and its execution as well.

A real redistribution of wealth and a real program of social security can be carried out in no other way than by the overthrow of the system of capitalism. That is not at all the purpose of the Huey Long third party movement. Only the working class revolution can accomplish that.

# For the American Workers --Labor Day or First?

Two days a year, on May first and on the first Monday in September workers may be seen marching to the sound of bands, listening to speeches. But what a contrast! Their outward similarity serves only to emphasize the profound historical and political difference of the celebrations. Both holidays are American in origin, both started in about the same period of the labor movement. Yet it would be difficult to find two days celebrated for more opposed purposes.

On Labor Day the bosses can smile at the parades, smiling with pride, because they know that the holiday is a gift they gave to the workers out of the kindness of their hearts. Though originally sponsored by the Knights of Labor in 1884, the idea of a holiday for the workers gained approval. On March 15, 1887, one year after the first great May Day strike in Chicago, Labor Day was made legal in Colorado. Other states quickly followed suit and it is now a national holiday. But it is also a day in which workers are herded by corrupt union officials to places where they will hear politicians make promises that are never kept after election day, two months later. Therefore the bosses want the parades to be a success. They want great numbers to attend. Police bands play patriotic hymns.

**Clubs and Bands**

But cops don't play piccolos on May Day. They wield clubs. The bosses are afraid. They hope the parades will be a flop. They know that the workers are celebrating their class independence and reviewing their fighting strength. May Day is not a gift. It is a holiday for which workers have to strike, as they did for the first time half a century ago in America.

The A. F. of L. was a young fighting organization then, known as the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. The fight for the eight-hour day was the most important question facing the working class as a whole. The organization of the Knights of Labor was soon to explode like a balloon with too thin a shell. So the Federation took up the struggle. At its fourth convention in October, 1884, it resolved that on May 1, 1886 there should be a strike in favor of the eight-hour day. During the following twenty months the movement gained the active support of workers and unions throughout the country despite the sabotage of Powderly, head of the Knights of Labor.

That first May Day was most successful in Chicago where 80,000 workers attended. In Chicago too the bosses hit back most cruelly. Four days later at a demonstration in Haymarket square a bomb exploded, killing a policeman. Four

of the workers' leaders, Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel were arrested and hanged. But the movement revived. In 1888 the Federation, now known as the A. F. of L., called for a strike on May 1, 1890. In the meantime, in Paris, the Second International was founded and the founding convention hearing of the fight for the 8-hour day in America resolved to support it. May Day, 1890, was the first international celebration of the working class. After that, the purpose of May Day was broadened. The International resolved that the demonstration should demand improved conditions for the workers in general, and that the workers should demand peace among nations. In Czarist Russia it became symbolic of the liberation of the people and, as everywhere, of the independent action of the proletarian masses, against war. May Day has become a political demonstration of working class solidarity throughout the world.

**A. F. of L. Condemns May Day**

The international character May Day has acquired is one of the things the bosses fear most. They know they cannot stand before a united working class. The A. F. of L. bureaucracy, forgetting the militant tradition which its organization founded, and having acquired a fat vested interest as strike breakers and disrupters, fear May Day as much as the bosses. The Executive Council submitted to the 1928 Convention of the A. F. of L. a report which read: "Hereafter May 1 will be known as Child Health Day, as the President (Hoover) is directed by the resolution passed by Congress . . . The object is to create sentiment for year-round protection of children. A most worthy purpose. At the same time May 1 no longer will be known as strike day. . . They are now the main celebrants of Labor Day, because they know that it is a harmless holiday, like St. Patrick's day, and very useful to them. Labor Day hypocritically glorifies the 'dignity of labor.' It is a celebration of the workers as part of the American capitalist community, of which the reactionary magazine 'World's Work' could say: 'It is like circus day.'"

But May Day is not a religious holiday like Christmas or Easter. Nor a national holiday like the 4th of July or Labor Day. It is something new: a workers' celebration of defiance for which the main slogan is "Down tools."

**MAY DAY GREETINGS, NEW MILITANT!**

A month to go on the sub campaign; Not to succeed would be one damn shame!

**CARA COOK, Former Bus. Mgr.**

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**The Southern Branches**

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Greet the NEW MILITANT on May Day

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**CHICAGO NOTICE**

The Italian Spartacus Workers Club has moved into its new headquarters, 1008 South Ashland Blvd. All comrades are requested to note this change of address and to communicate all matters hereafter to the above number.

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**South Philadelphia Branch Workers Party from Greetings to the NEW MILITANT**

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TO THE

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AND THE

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**MAY DAY GREETINGS**

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... Greet ...

**The NEW MILITANT**

**Onward to a Fourth International!**