

The Negro Question

By J. R. JOHNSON

The sharecropper was one of the particular darlings of Roosevelt's fireside chats. He was really the forgotten man. He was at the bottom of the one-third of a nation. How has he fared under the benevolent (in words) rule of the defunct New Deal? Let us hear again from the man on the spot:

"I am afraid it is getting monotonous to write of the nauseating poverty of the cotton sharecroppers, tenants and day laborers. So much has been written about it that it seems that everyone should know all the details. Yet it has to be seen and lived to really understand to what degradation human beings have fallen under the system of landlordism and capitalist exploitation. I found one family of nine with one fork for the whole family. I leave the scene at mealtime to your imagination. For a solid week I did not once get a chance to sit down comfortably simply because the few chairs the croppers possess are generally of the cane seat variety with the seat missing.

"To understand the bitter wrath under the surface of their feelings you must realize that grievances are piling up because of little economic advantages which croppers used to enjoy are one by one being eliminated. It used to be, for instance, that wood for cooking and heating was free. But the rapid clearing of the land has finally resulted in the cropper having to buy coal. Hunting and fishing used to be counted on to supplement their scanty fare. But fish and game laws and license requirements have stopped a practically free source of food. The landlord seems unconcerned about these things. He stops his croppers from having pigs and chickens for fear that croppers will steal his corn for feed. The cropper would be quite willing to grow his own corn but that is not permitted because it would take time away from the cotton crop. The same thing goes for a vegetable garden. And so an accumulation of grievances builds up and makes the cropper eager for the message of unionism as a partial answer to his economic problems.

"I wonder how those people survive the winter. Pneumonia is bound to get them. Tuberculosis has gotten two of them in the 'Lost Colony' camp in the last six weeks. The tuberculosis was not contracted in 'Lost Colony' camp. It was contracted in their work as sharecroppers, living in gin houses unfit for habitation and eating food unfit for consumption.

"No Bosses After Awhile"

Although their state has been getting worse with the general decline of the capitalist system, it is nothing new. What is new is a united attempt among the croppers to fight for something approaching human living standards. The croppers are organizing. Into two unions, the STFU and the UCAPAWA (the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America), they are organizing. Black and white, they are organizing.

And in spite of all repressions, they are organizing. When they meet at a cropper's cabin, there are defense guards posted up and down the road. But the morale is good, whether at a local meeting in a cabin or a district meeting. They begin ordinarily by singing "Freedom," their own song, two of the many stanzas of which go as follows:

Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, There'll be freedom after a while, 'Cause before I'll be a slave I'll be buried in my grave, So there'll be some freedom after a while. Boss'll miss me, Boss'll miss me, Boss'll miss me after a while, 'Cause before I'll be a slave I'll be buried in my grave, So there'll be no bosses after a while.

Watch January 10th

Our correspondent attended the meeting of the leaders of the southeast Missouri locals of the UCAPAWA. "108 leaders" arrived in time for the meeting. Several dozen more didn't get there because of breakdowns in their dilapidated cars. The camp is from 60 to 140 miles from the cotton district, as a meeting in the cotton district cannot take place in our free country.

"The meeting was for the purpose of instructing leaders as to the correct steps to take in the imminent crisis. Evictées are already being notified to vacate their land by January 1st, which, with ten days' grace, will mean January 10th. Usually the planters do not give this notice until after Christmas. . . . They are that kind-hearted. But this year they just can't wait. Their greed for the government payment, in which the cropper won't share if the landowner switches to day labor, is so strong that they won't take a chance on a last minute ruling by the AAA which may upset their plans of getting their mitts on that government check. It is known by now that if the landowner gets the entire AAA check his labor cost for making a cotton crop is entirely absorbed by the government, so that his cotton crop costs the landowner nothing, neither effort nor money. The situation is comparable to the government meeting a factory payroll and permitting the owner of the factory to have the product. . . .

"This Ain't Our Government"

"A social explosion may take place on January 10th. . . . There is no place for these landless, homeless people to go except their 93 acre camp near Poplar Bluff. We are looking for thousands of families to start marching towards the camp. The Chamber of Commerce of Poplar Bluff has already passed a motion refusing them access to their own land, in order to keep them out of 'their country.'"

Croppers are not yet strong. They are in two unions instead of one. They are opposed by the united strength of reaction. But they are gaining one advantage that must eventually sweep everything before it—the realization of their own strength, the knowledge that they must fight, black and white, together. As one cropper put it, "This ain't our government. The sheriff ain't our sheriff, the governor ain't our governor, the president ain't our president. Some day we'll change that."

Roosevelt Tells Congress He Wants Guns, Not Jobs

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In fact, despite some pious interjections about his peaceful aims, the whole logic of this main section of his speech was aimed to justify American intervention in the war, not because of immediate danger to America, but on a pseudo-Messianic theory that it is the business of American imperialism to put the world in order.

"For it becomes clearer and clearer that the future world will be a shabby and dangerous place to live in—even for Americans to live in—if it is ruled by force in the hands of a few. . . . We must look ahead and see the kind of lives our children would have to lead if a large part of the rest of the world were compelled to worship a god imposed by a military ruler. . . . We must look ahead and see the effect on our future generations if world trade is controlled by any nation or group of nations which sets up that control through military force."

It was in this grandiose pose of solver of the world's problems that Roosevelt called for increases in taxation to provide the unprecedented sums he was seeking for the army and navy.

Increases in taxation to buy guns to put the world in "order"—this was the demand of the president who, in these seven years of economic crisis, has not once asked for increased taxes to provide jobs and relief for America's jobless and hungry millions! In that one fact is revealed the utter hypocrisy of his pseudo-Messianic pose.

"Order"—For What? The "order" he wants to impose on the world has nothing to do with peace and freedom and security. For it that were his aim, he could have done something during these past seven years to provide jobs and food for America's refugees at home. He wants an "order" in which American financiers and industrialists can reign supreme in the world's markets and dictate to all the terms on which they can do business with America. That is what he meant when he said:

"We do not have to go to war with other nations, but"—what a revealing word, that but!—"at least we can strive with other nations to encourage the kind of peace that will lighten the troubles of the

world, and by so doing help our own nation as well." A war or a "peace" to conquer the world's markets and fields of investment on behalf of Wall Street—that is Roosevelt's aim, scarcely hidden by the rhetoric of his speech.

No humanitarian motives are moving him. That fact can be testified to by the millions who went hungry these seven years, the WPA workers whom he fired, the WPA strikers whom he dismissed and jailed, the millions of European refugees who clamored vainly at his doors, the thirteen million Negroes who live in the Democratic South under fascist conditions.

And to carry out his war of conquest undisturbed, Roosevelt demanded "national unity." The

struggle of labor for its rights he characterized, in thinly veiled terms, as a doctrine which "sets trying to set our own people to fighting among themselves."

better life, all militant attempts to defend the rights of labor and as treason because it disrupts "national unity." Roosevelt is laying the ground for systematic the unemployed, are to be labeled class against class" and "weakening us in the face of danger, by Henceforth all demands for a suppression of labor's rights!

Every workingclass group should read and study Roosevelt's annual message to Congress, in order to realize the necessity for mobilizing the labor movement. In defense against the oppression which are cloaked, by this pseudo-Messianic policy

"ANNALIST" SAYS STOCK MARKET HIT BY SOVIET WAR

The Annalist, economic journal published by the New York Times, authoritative spokesman for the capitalist class, makes several editorial comments about Russia's invasion of Finland, in its December 7 issue.

"The International Nickel Company has been developing newly discovered nickel deposits in Finland." It has spent an estimated total of \$7,300,000 since 1933.

"Inasmuch as 90 per cent of the world's nickel production is produced in Canada, the strategic importance of this Finnish deposit to Russia and its friend Germany is self-evident. In view of Russia's puppet, socialistic State projected for Finland, what will happen to these Canadian and British-owned deposits is equally self-evident.

"The stock market is definitely behind industrial production. . . . The advance of communism into Poland and now Finland and the abolition of private property in those areas, actual or eventual, is certainly not a development likely to encourage enhancement of stock values. An eventual collapse of Germany may likewise see communism spring up in Europe's leading industrial country. In that event, the actual cooperation be-

Behind the Lines

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The Finns, by inflicting defeats, prove that the Russian military machine is not as formidable and Russia is not as invulnerable as advertised. Thus the ground is removed from under the feet of the intriguers. If Russia is revealed as weaker than imagined, there is no need to be anxious about the bolshevist menace to Europe."

What this means concretely, Augur indicates, is that extensive aid will be given to the Finns and the Swedes persuaded to come in to make sure the Russians remain deeply engaged in the north. This will have the double effect of cutting off the always problematical Russian aid to Germany and leave the powers free to crush their enemies, one after another.

tween Germany and the Soviet, which is now conspicuous by its absence, may have implications that are not at all pleasant to visualize. The seriousness of Russia's invasion of Finland appears to have been minimized by most commentators, but it has certainly been recognized by the stock market."

TOLEDO SCHOOLS REOPEN AFTER SIX WEEKS; TEACHERS STILL UNPAID

TOLEDO, Ohio, Jan. 2—Schools opened today for the 45,000 school children, after a six-week shutdown due to "lack of funds," but nobody knows how long the schools will remain open or when the teachers will be paid.

By closing the schools for six weeks the Board of Education cut the current deficit to \$600,000, but nobody knows where that sum is coming from. Neither state or city authorities are making a move to find the funds. Proposed abolition of "frills"—kindergartens, trade schools, health

services—would provide less than 20 per cent of the deficit.

The 1500 teachers have not been paid since mid-October. For eight years now they have been paid from "fifty to 88 per cent of their salaries. Yet the favorite solution of the Toledo Real Estate Board is to "solve" the school crisis by slashing the teachers' salaries. Fortunately, the teachers are beginning to fight back. A strike of the teachers looms as a real possibility in the event their salaries are cut any further.

In This Corner

by MAX SHACHTMAN

Finland—And a Word About Poland

The ruling class nowadays differs in many ways from the ruling classes centuries ago. In those days, wars of rapine and booty could be carried out, with all their attendant misery for the people, without the creation of great war-machines. Armies were more or less mercenary and the arming of the people for war was not required on anything like the scale demanded by war today.

Modern war requires at least the tacit support of millions. The powers that be would never dare to equip the masses with modern arms without that support. But how acquire it? The masses are suspicious enough as it is—and restless enough. They cannot very easily be gotten to serve as cannon fodder if they are told that the war is being fought for colonial empire or new sources of raw material or fields of investment of surplus capital. They have to be given a more idealistic aim: democracy, justice, freedom, defense of popular rights, struggle against despotism, and the like. Once the masses have been sufficiently confused and poisoned with lies, their masters feel less uneasy about providing them with arms which, as history has shown so often, have the ingenious faculty of shooting no matter what direction they are pointed in. . . .

Even Hitler, who rules at home all the weapons of totalitarian terror, finds himself obliged to drug his slaves with the propaganda that they are fighting, in the war, for the establishment of "socialism." Stalin, arch-suppressor of revolution, finds it wise to tell the masses that they are fighting for the "liberation of the peoples." In the "democracies," war is being fought, of course, for the "preservation" of democracy and the "independence" of the small nations.

Right now, the war-mongers are having a poison-penic with Finland. People are literally starving to death amid unprecedented wealth—in Cleveland and not only in Cleveland. That's a bit of a scandal, you see, and it has to be covered up, especially in face of the fact that the rulers of the United States, who haven't any money to spare for the prevention of starvation, have hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars for the building up of the biggest war machine this country has ever known. Placed starkly side by side, that wouldn't look so good. The hue and cry over Finland helps to cover up both.

Starving or well-fed—what does it matter? cry the champagne-and-caviar-stuffed bankers and industrial magnates. The important thing is to prepare to defend ourselves, our women and children and our modest little homes in Newport and on Park Avenue. Look at poor little Finland! How democratic! How brave!

A Few Words On Poland

These remarks about the war-mongers and poor little Finland remind us about the chauvinistic campaign of the war-mongers about poor little Poland, only a few months ago. How they wailed and gnashed their teeth at seeing that tender little flower of democracy nipped in the bud! Now that the invasion of Poland is over, and they feel they have squeezed all they can out of it for their war-mongering purposes, they are allowing a slim sliver of the truth about this "democracy" to pierce through the columns of their press.

One example—there aren't many, you may be sure!—is the column of Harry Elmer Barnes in the N. Y. World-Telegram of December 22, 1939, commenting on an article on Poland by Max Nomad, who is one of the best-informed men in this country on the history and conditions of that country. Says Barnes who, be it noted, is himself a bourgeois democrat:

"The war in the name of civilization was undertaken in defense of the Polish government, which had an unsavory record, so far as democracy, social justice and minority rights are concerned. The Polish state gave evidence of the defects and vices of Germany and Russia without whatever virtues these larger totalitarian states may possess in the way of efficiency. . . .

"Democracy and party government were stifled (by the 'Colonels'.—MS.). The able military leadership of the pre-1918 days were excluded from the army and amateurs substituted. Marshal Smigly-Rydz, commander in chief of the army last autumn, was, like Hitler, a painter before he was elevated to a high military post. Anti-Semitism was revived and the Jewish population, much larger than that of Germany, was treated brutally." (Which didn't prevent the Jewish bourgeois and "socialist" press here from becoming wild-eyed Polish patriots during the invasion!)

"Worst of all was the increasing economic desperation of the worthy Polish masses. Many peasants could not even afford salt. They learned to split a single match into four usable parts. They literally had to replace worn-out steel axes by those fashioned out of stone—like the men of the cave period. . . .

"When their neighbor, Czechoslovakia, was butchered in 1938, the Polish leaders stood by, eager to snatch their slice of the booty."

He Can Talk Now

It is of course a little safer for Mr. Barnes to speak of Poland in this way toward the end of December than at the beginning of September. Then the war-mongering wave in this country over the question of poor little Poland was at its height, and truth was at a premium. The war-mongers were able to increase considerably the poison-content in the mind of the masses.

They are doing the same now about Mannerheim's Finland. The revolutionary Marxists, who were not Hitlerites when they denounced the war-mongers' fraud about "poor little Poland" and "poor little (imperialist!) Czechoslovakia" before it, and are not Stalinists when we denounce the similar fraud about "poor little Finland" today, are not only the only ones who must tell the truth to the people, but the only ones who can afford to tell it. And not when it's "all over"—but in good time.

4. "We Won't Fight the Bolsheviks!"

MUTINY!

The Black Sea Mutinies

by "Spartacus"

a French port since 1916. When the armistice came, the men were overjoyed. They would go home at last! But on December 2, the France sailed for the Black Sea. When she arrived in Odessa, her sailors had their first contact with the Bolsheviks. Incidents took place such as Andre Marty, one of the leaders of the mutinies, describes in his book, "La Revolte de la Mer Noire":

A small detachment of Red cossacks passed. Very simply, they came over and shook our hands. This spontaneous gesture towards those who had been fighting them only a few days before touched us. One of us who knew a little Russian started a conversation. One of the cossacks asked us why we treated them like enemies, since they were fighting against the exploiters and bosses. We were embarrassed and understood the shameful role our government was making us play. Our comrade promised them we would not hinder their struggle for freedom. We parted the warmest of friends. . . .

Conditions were bad in the French Black Sea fleet. Mail from home came two months late. At 20 degrees below zero, the sailors were dressed in ragged linen suits. Worst of all, 700 sailors had to do the work of 1100 on the France. When the ship reached Sevastopol, the order was given to lay down a barrage against the Red troops. Some of the men locked themselves in the lavatories and refused to carry out orders. The next morning when vice-admiral Amet, the commander of the fleet, was leaving the ship he was booed and hissed.

Four sailors were arrested, among them Vuillemin, the leader of the real mutiny. The next day coaling of 700 tons of coal for Easter Sunday and Monday was ordered. Then men were

tired and hoped for a rest after their fatigue at Odessa. And now even their holiday was to be taken away. Disaffection was expressed quite openly. In the afternoon, those who did not want to coal the next day were ordered to assemble on the forward deck after mass. 400 sailors gathered. Marty describes what happened:

All of a sudden they began to sing. First the Song of Odessa. Then—shouts arose through the calm spring evening. . . . The forward light is put out and in reply the International is sung. The officers, terrified, assemble on the rear deck and arm themselves. And now from the Jean-Bart comes the same song. Then cries of "To arms! To the water! Guns!" and the sailors rush towards the rear knocking down the sergeant at arms.

The mutiny had begun. Soon a delegation was appointed to find out the situation on other boats. A steam pinnace was commandeered for the occasion. The Jean-Bart was the first to be visited. Here the delegates ran through the sleeping quarters of the crew shaking the hammocks and crying "Get up! Get up! Revolution! To the Bridge!"

A "DEBATE" BETWEEN ADMIRAL AND SAILORS

In the meantime, vice-admiral Amet, warned of the mutiny on the France, came to restore order. His first appeal, "There are 200 bad Frenchmen in the crew" was met with cries of "Kill the tyrant! Kill him! Get rid of him! Kill him!" Then he tried "The bolsheviks are abominable bandits. . . . who kill women and children and old people." A sailor countered: "You are the real bandit! Because I stood up for my rights, you let me rot in a dark cell. It is you who, without cause, pitilessly condemn sailors to 5 to 10 years of forced labor!" The admiral's reply was interrupted by cries of "He lies! He

is trying to put us to sleep! It's a lot of rot!" The admiral changed his tune: "My children, I beg of you, restore order." But the sailors were in no mood for carressing speeches. "This is not the time to say a mass. Kill the tyrant! Bandit! Assassin! To Toulon! To Toulon!" they cried.

"What do you want?" The Admiral asked feebly. And the sailors forcefully presented their demands: No coaling on the 20th and 21st—end of intervention in Russia and immediate return home of the France—leaves for the crew—softening of discipline—better food—better mail conveniences—demobilization, following gout the decrees sent from Paris—1100 men on board, not 700—better disciplinary regime (there are endless inspections but no clothes). The demands concluded: "The war on Russia is unconstitutional. Clemenceau has violated the constitution."

"THAT RAG MEANS CIVIL WAR"

The following morning, Easter Sunday, the sailors slept late. When they did get up there was "much animation and little work". The International was sung and the red flag raised. A thrilling sight to the bolsheviks on the shore, but to the officers on board an ominous portent: One of them says, "You don't understand what that rag means! This is civil war." Angry voices reply, "Too bad! You asked for it!"

One officer proposes that if order is restored "a bottle of champagne will be given to each sailor" at dinner. They know what this means. "We are not fish; we cannot be caught on a hook." The hook had been tried at breakfast. It was sugar in the coffee. And again at lunchtime—a four course Easter dinner with wine rations doubled.

But the sailors were not deterred by the kindness of their masters. Rather they were en-

couraged at their own successes. During the morning the French sailors had been fraternizing with Russian workers who had come out in small boats. The officers had tried to keep the workers and sailors apart but, after one sharp conflict, the officers were convinced that the crew meant business. A boatload of sailors returning from leave were greeted by the International. They responded and raised a red belt as a symbol of their revolutionary comradeship.

In the afternoon a number of the sailors of the France were granted leave to go into Sevastopol. There they decided on a demonstration with sailors of the other boats in the harbor. They were joined in their march through the town by Russian workers until the marchers numbered 3000. The marchers were orderly and in a jovial holiday mood. Outside a pharmacy they were stopped by a French officer who wished them to give up their red flag. He was pushed aside. And then from an ambush, machine gun fire. Six sailors and six civilians were killed. The murderers were officers from the Jean-Bart. This last attempt of the masters to frighten the mutineers into submission only cemented the comradeship between the French and Russian oppressed and determined the sailors to continue their struggle.

That evening a delegation from the army came on board the France and demanded that the French troops in Sevastopol be demobilized and sent home with the fleet. The next day, Admiral Amet agreed that the France should sail for home on April 23, to be followed by the rest of the fleet a week later. Once the France was back in French waters, the leaders of the mutiny, despite promises to the contrary, were tried and sentenced to prison terms. But the military authorities did not dare to carry out any death sentences against the mutineers of the France—or, for that matter, against any of the Black Sea rebels.

The essence of these mutinies was expressed in the slogans at the end of a leaflet circulated by the mutineers throughout the Black Sea fleet: "WE WON'T FIGHT THE BOLSHEVIKS! WORKERS OUGHT NOT TO KILL WORKERS! OUR ONLY ENEMIES ARE THE OFFICERS!"