

## The Negro Question

by R. L. BIRCHMAN

War correspondents for the Negro press have referred to the valor and courage of France's native troops and glowed with pride because of the fact that there are a great number of Negroes serving in the French army. They claim that this is an indication of no discrimination. One will hear more of this, when America's Sixty Millions call on the Negroes to sacrifice their lives once more to "save the world for democracy."

Let us tear off the mask of French imperialism, cast aside the fraudulent claims of tolerance and see the realities behind the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

The natives of French tropical colonies are classed either as citizens or subjects. The natives in the towns of St. Louis, Dakar and the Island of Gore in West Africa are citizens. These natives acquired this status by a historical accident. As a result of the revolt of the Haitian slaves during the French Revolution, the Paris Assembly, in its Declaration of the Brotherhood of Man in 1794, abolished slavery in the colonies. With the hardening of reaction in France against the revolution, slavery was reestablished in 1803. The natives again found themselves the chattels of their white masters. However since freedom once achieved is not readily given up, the West Indian Negroes took up the revolutionary struggle which had receded in France. In 1848 the French bourgeoisie granted full political rights to all persons living in their colonies as a measure to prevent revolts against their rule.

Natives in French West Africa born outside St. Louis, Dakar and Gore are not citizens but subjects, since these territories were incorporated into the French Empire after 1848, when the French bourgeoisie having consolidated their power, saw no reason to extend the rights of citizenship to the natives. Thus while a million and a half natives living in the central area of Senegal are citizens, the sixty millions living outside these areas are subjects. What is the meaning of this distinction?

The black citizens of Senegal elect their own deputy to the Chamber of Deputies in Paris and share with the whites a certain amount of autonomy in the administration of Dakar and St. Louis.

### Sixty Million Without Rights

The subjects have no constitutional rights. But by fulfilling certain civil and military qualifications they may apply for citizenship. An example is the recent decree issued by the French Colonial Ministry. It grants the right to vote to natives who voluntarily enlist for military service—a privileged not extended to those who are conscripted. The French thus hope to stimulate recruiting in their colonies. Natives thus granted citizenship will be exempt, along with other citizens, from such obligations as forced labor, payment of head tax, and other irksome duties—the penalty for being a subject.

France's small number of black citizens only have to serve two years in the army and that service is in Africa. But the millions of black subjects must serve three years in the army and are sent far from home, to Indo-China, Syria, and Europe to die as shock troops for French "democracy."

The French, in order to secure the services of their black colonials in protecting their ill-gotten gains, throw out sops to the small number of black elite in order to more effectively corral the masses for war and labor services. The elite as citizens have the right to be tried under French law and to retain the services of a lawyer. But subjects are dealt with by political officers and chiefs, in accordance with local decrees and statutes. On occasion, to prove the "liberality" of the mother country, natives are given positions of minor importance.

### One Deputy for Sixty Million!

France with a population of 40 million has 500 deputies in parliament, but the more than sixty million natives of French Africa have only one. The chiefs and "kings" are not hereditary or elected leaders as before their conquest by France, but are hand-picked stooges, trained by the French and dependent upon their exploiters for their jobs. They depend for their pay on the taxes they can squeeze out of the starving black peasants. They are even more reactionary than their white masters.

Blaise Diagne, the first Senegalese to be elected a deputy and the only African native to reach a post of importance in the French administration, is an example of the role of the citizens as lackies of French imperialism. Diagne served in the last World War as a recruiting sergeant for French, recruiting the native tribesmen for cannon fodder. His services were rewarded with the post of Under-Secretary for Colonies under Laval. He was sent to defend the policy of forced labor, which the French rubber companies were using in the Congo, at the International Convention on Forced Labor in Geneva in 1928. In the face of strong sentiment for abolition of the system Diagne maintained that it was the "sovereign right of France to impose conscription in whatever forms it pleased." He supported it on the grounds of "the educational value of conscription to native peoples."

France has good reason to be thankful to her black elite. As George Padmore, writing in *Piebs*, states:

"This division between citizens and subjects is a deliberate and calculated policy of French imperialism, aimed at aligning the elite with the white ruling class, of which they consider themselves a part. . . . Within the French Empire the defined division marked out by its rulers between citizens and subjects has served to hold back the growth of the national liberation movement far behind the militant level it has achieved in the British African colonies. Not one of the Negroes purporting to represent their people in the Chamber of Deputies has ever done a single thing to advance the cause of the great masses of workers and peasants in the colonial territories from which they come. Not one trade union organization have they formed, not one cooperative—nothing. Soldiers or politicians, they have all distinguished themselves in promoting and defending the interests of their white masters."

The once progressive slogan of the French Revolution—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—is now but a mask for French colonial despotism.

# The Fight for a National Union of Seamen, United Around a Program of Class Struggle

(From the report of the Maritime Fraction to the April 5-9 Convention of the Socialist Workers Party)

One of the most important single tasks in the American labor movement today—especially as the war draws nearer to this country daily—is the building of a national organization of seamen based upon a class struggle program. It is a great, historic task. Every step toward it involves struggles—struggles against the employers and the government, against the class-collaborationists in both the AFL and CIO, and particularly against the greatest internal enemy of the maritime workers, the Stalinists who, at this time, provide the greatest obstacle to the development of a national organization of seamen based upon a fighting program.

Most workers who try to keep in touch with trade union developments know something about the militant role of the Sailors Union of the Pacific and its struggles for a national organization of seamen, and know also something about the reactionary role of the Stalinist waterfront machine headed by Harry Bridges. But the situation existing in maritime today is so complex that, even for a general understanding of it, it is necessary to briefly outline the various forces in the unions involved. Such an outline will necessarily deal mainly with the West Coast, because today that is the main base of the contending forces.

### BRIDGES' MACHINE FACES A NEW OPPOSITION

The International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (CIO) embraces all Pacific Coast longshoremen, except a small section, mainly around Tacoma, who still remain in the AFL International Longshoremen's Association which dominates the East Coast and Gulf. The ILWU also has inland and waterfront warehousemen on the West Coast. From Alaska to San Diego it numbers some 13,000 longshoremen. Headed by Bridges, it is the base of the Stalinist machine in the CIO on the West Coast.

Ever since the end of the '34 waterfront strike, which coincided with the end of the Stalinist "Third Period," the Stalinist policy has been consistently one of class-collaboration, covered up by militant phrases. This policy has led now to Bridges' "Five Year Peace Plan," a policy of long-term agreements and compulsory arbitration. The ILWU is now negotiating with the shipowners, with Bridges "asking no concessions," for a long-term agreement. Bridges agreeing to arbitrate everything in the agreement.

Six years of false Stalinist policy have not gone by without strong opposition from the ranks. Just prior to Bridges' switch from the AFL to the CIO a powerful opposition developed within the union against the Bridges machine. Then came the switch—and John L. Lewis' appointment of Bridges as CIO director of the West Coast. That, plus the stupidity of the opposition, saved Bridges' skin.

The opposition, blinded by their hatred of the Stalinists, made the fatal error of not going along into the CIO. That made it comparatively easy for Bridges to discredit them; and thereafter any voice raised within the ILWU in opposition to Bridges was stigmatized as a stooge for the discredited opposition. Stalinist manipulation of the CIO vs. AFL issue forced unions which had been in opposition to Bridges—notably the Shipyard Workers Union—to line up with the CIO in loyalty to their parent body. Bridges has been thus trading on CIO capital ever since he received the progressive mantle of the CIO to cover his reactionary policies.

However, the cloak is wearing thin. A new opposition is arising within the ILWU, centered in the Northwest. A few weeks ago the Seattle local ousted every known Communist party stooge and elected a complete opposition slate. The opposition in the Portland local is strong and getting stronger.

PROGRESSIVES DEMAND ORIGINAL MARITIME FEDERATION OF '34

The Seattle opposition expresses the demand for re-constituting the once-powerful Maritime Federation of the Pacific as a central body for unions in the maritime transport industry—Longshoremen, Sailors, Marine Firemen, Cooks and Stewards, Masters, Mates and Pilots, Marine Engineers, and Teamsters—and keeping out the paper and irrelevant unions through which the Stalinists seized control of the Federation and drove out the seamen, reducing the Federation to a caricature.

The Stalinist leadership of the ILWU viciously opposes this demand, knowing that in a reconstituted Federation they would lose control. San Francisco remains the stronghold of the Stalinist machine in the ILWU, for here the top-flight C.P. leaders are concentrated and here they have systematically colonized the union with supporters from outside.

The Marine Cooks and Stewards (CIO) is a West Coast organization of about 4,500 members which, under Stalinist control, affiliated to the CIO after the longshoremen. The Cooks have no independent policy and can have none, by virtue of their position in the industry. Their natural place is alongside the real power on the ships, the Sailors and Firemen. But under Stalinist leadership they have tailed behind the longshoremen, who have led them into a blind alley.

### STALINIST GENERALS LEAD COOKS UP A TREE

The Stalinist leadership of the Cooks followed Bridges in signing indefinite extensions of their current agreements last September, to be followed by negotiations with the shipowners, with a clause requiring sixty days notice of termination of the agreement, if they were unable to come to further terms in the negotiations with the shipowners. Bridges did this with the Longshoremen without prior consultation with any of the other maritime unions, putting each on its own.

The Sailors and Firemen refused to go for this extension policy, won concessions and signed regular agreements.

When the Cooks, after signing the indefinite extension, entered into "negotiations," naturally the shipowners responded with a retort: NO to every proposal for improvements in the agreement. What is more, Bridges has notified the Cooks that the Longshoremen would not support any union striking for increased wages or improved working conditions.

This brought the Cooks' membership smack up against the net result of the whole previous policy of their Stalinist leadership in tailing Bridges' Longshoremen machine. The Cooks have the worst agreement of any of the unlicensed groups and the membership knows it.

COOKS ORGANIZE AGAINST STALINIST MISLEADERS

The militant members want to do something about it. Logically their interest lies in allying themselves with the other unlicensed groups, the Sailors and Firemen, for their problems are similar, problems which are peculiar to seamen and which do not confront shore-side workers. A progressive group is developing, whose program is based on bringing the Cooks toward closer collaboration with the Sailors and Firemen. The progressives were successful in having the Cooks go on record against Bridges' "Peace Plan." While the Stalinist leadership is still strongly entrenched, a large section of the union is being welded together against this leadership which has betrayed them.

Of the other, and minor, organizations that follow the Stalinist line, not much need be said. The American Communications Association (CIO), covering the ship wireless operators, is Stalinist-controlled. It plays no significant role. Its membership considers itself part of the officers corps aboard ship and with few exceptions is as much company-conscious as the other officers groups.

The Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, comprising the engineers aboard ship, is also CIO. Extremely unreliable and company-conscious. It does not have closed shop agreements except with a few lines. The San Francisco headquarters follows the Bridges line. The branches are opposed to Bridges and there is strong sentiment for withdrawal from the CIO to set up an independent union.



HARRY LUNDBERG

al from the CIO to set up an independent union.

While we are mentioning minor organizations, let us include the Masters, Mates and Pilots, which is the same type as the engineers and radio men, but affiliated to the AFL.

### FIREMEN STILL FIGHTING STALINIST WRECKERS

The Marine Firemen, Oilers, Waterenders and Wipers Association (Independent), with a membership of 4,000, has always been closely allied with the Sailors. Controlling steam, the firemen are one of the most strategic units aboard ship. One of the main points in Stalinist strategy has been to drive a wedge between the Firemen and Sailors, to gain control of the Firemen and use them as a weapon to destroy the S.U.P. Several years ago the Stalinists captured the San Francisco headquarters of the Firemen and rode roughshod over the branches in their desperate attempts to smash the Sailors.

But Stalinist control did not last long. Firemen, progressives launched the weekly "West Coast Firemen," and one of the main planks of its program was amalgamation of the unlicensed groups, primarily the firemen and sailors. The paper had the support of all the branches and soon rallied a majority of the membership behind it. In the next election the progressives won, and mopped up completely in the election after that.

The overwhelming majority of the membership who had supported the fight against the Stalinist machine thought the fight was over. But it was not, at San Francisco headquarters, thanks to Bridges' machine in the longshoremen. He maintains a permit system in the ILWU, with about 700 men usually on the permit list. By a judicious distribution of these permits, the Stalinist machine is able to maintain a sizeable number of seamen on the beach who, holding ILWU permits, get enough longshore work to maintain themselves. Which means that to keep their permits they have to vote "right" in the Sailors or the Firemen where they are members.

Unfortunately, also, the person upon whom the Firemen membership counted to eliminate the Stalinists proved incapable of fulfilling the task—Malone, the secretary. Essentially a conservative trade union official, he finds himself in agreement on many issues with the Stalinist class collaboration line. As proven by the experience of the Sailors, the only effective way to eliminate Stalinist influence is by pushing ahead with an aggressive class struggle program. The Firemen's branches, however, remain free from

Stalinist influence and, equally important, work closely with the Sailors.

### TEAMSTERS ARE A POWERFUL FACTOR

The Teamsters (AFL) are one of the most powerful groups on the waterfront. They have been throughout under conservative leadership. Nevertheless, it was the support of the Teamsters in the '34 strike, when they refused to go through the picket lines, that swung the tide for the waterfront unions.

The Teamsters have been in conflict with Bridges since he began moving into the inland warehouses, over which the Teamsters have AFL jurisdiction. When Bridges tried the same trick with the Teamsters that he had used on the Sailors and Firemen, of passing out permits in return for support, the Teamsters retaliated by issuing a retiring card to every teamster working on a longshore permit. As the conflict with Bridges became more acute, the Teamsters became more amenable to close collaboration with the Sailors.

### S.U.P. IS MOST PROGRESSIVE FACTOR IN INDUSTRY

Against this background of the other factors in the maritime industry, the role of the Sailors Union of the Pacific can now be seen more clearly.

The SUP is unquestionably the most progressive force in the maritime industry. Its fight against the union-taming program of the U.S. Maritime Commission is a historic landmark of American labor. Thanks to the SUP the government's flank hiring halls, established on the East Coast with the consent of the Stalinist-led National Maritime Union, never got a foothold on the West Coast. The SUP also has led the fight against the government's "training ships," designed to turn out scabs for a future showdown between the unions and the government, which considers the merchant marine an auxiliary to the navy. Likewise the Sailors lead the fight against the Bridges-employers' "Peace Plan."

When one considers all that the Sailors have done in the last six years, it is extraordinary to recall that the SUP embraces only approximately 5,000 members—the total personnel of its craft in West Coast shipping. But its class-struggle program, the homogeneity of its membership, its uncompromising stand at every point against class collaboration either with government or employers, makes it a factor in maritime out of all proportion to its numerical strength. Toward it all progressives in the industry look for leadership.

For progressives in every craft remember the time when Harry Lundberg, secretary-treasurer of the SUP, also headed the Maritime Federation of the Pacific and all the maritime crafts operated under the slogan: "An injury to one is an injury to all." Those were the days when the bosses were on the run.

But then began the Stalinist business of getting control by pushing into the federation shore-side unions not directly engaged in maritime transportation. The growing resentment among the maritime crafts finally exploded at the 1938 convention of the Maritime Federation, when the Bridges machine refused to seat the Tacoma Longshoremen delegates although having accepted per capita payments from them. And this came on top of the Shepard Line dispute, when the Stalinist National Maritime Union tried to break the Sailors and Firemen's contracts with that line, and the Tacoma Longshoremen had, supporting the Sailors and Firemen, successfully tied up several Shepard ships.

The Sailors, Firemen, and Masters, Mates & Pilots, walked out with the Tacoma group. Bridges replaced them with shore-side unions; the federation ceased to be "maritime" in reality.

### S.U.P. LEADS STEPS TO MARITIME UNITY

In every maritime craft today the men remember what the federation once was. It is this attachment that makes the slogan of reconstituting the Maritime Federation on its original basis, such a powerful slogan.

Meanwhile, to fill the gap, the Sailors have taken the lead in forming Joint Councils of Marine Crafts in every port. The Stalinists have maneuvered the Headquarters of the Firemen back into the "maritime" Federation, but the Firemen branches all refused to follow, so that in three of the major ports, Portland, Seattle and San Pedro, the Firemen are with their natural allies, the Sailors, in the Joint Councils of Marine Crafts, together with the Teamsters, the Masters, Mates & Pilots and the Puget Sound ILA longshoremen. The real economic strength on the waterfront is obviously on the side of these councils, whose existence clearly exposes the fact that Bridges' "maritime" federation is nothing but a caricature of the original.

But strength on the Pacific Coast is not enough to assure the survival of the Sailors and Firemen. The East Coast and Gulf must be organized, and on a militant basis, or the shipowners and the government can utilize the other coats to destroy the West Coast unions. The U.S. Maritime Commission succeeded in establishing its flank hiring halls on the East Coast with the cooperation of the Stalinist leadership of the "National" Maritime Union, likewise the flank training ship program. When the Shepard Line, two years ago, as advance scout for the rest of the shipowners, tried to break its contracts with the Sailors and Firemen, it got crews and a "contract" from the NMU on the East Coast.

### NMU LAUNCHES SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION

The Shepard Line dispute was the final alarm signal to the SUP that it was necessary to find allies and extend the organization nationally. At the time the SUP was an independent union, although it retained its affiliation to the AFL Labor Councils in the ports and to the State Federation of Labor. The AFL International Seamen's Union, of which the SUP had originally been part, had meanwhile gone to pieces. At the 1938 convention of the AFL the SUP applied and secured an international charter as the Seafarers International Union of North America. The AFL had chartered several federal locals on the East Coast and the Gulf, which were now taken into the SIU.

In the last two years a whole series of revolts have taken place within the Stalinist National Maritime Union, notably in the Gulf. The Gulf had always been the most militant section of the NMU and the section most sympathetic with the policies of the West Coast Sailors and Firemen. Many of the rebels are now in the SIU but, unfortunately, the remaining old-line AFL officials from the former federal locals have not known how to profit from the revolts against the Stalinist leadership in the NMU.

On the fundamental questions of the government flank hall and flank training the SIU has a similar policy to that of the SUP. With that as a foundation and with the support of the West Coast section, a militant development of the SIU is in the cards. The recent contracts signed by the NMU, giving way to the employers on all key questions in a desperate attempt to keep the dues coming in, are literally forcing the development of new opposition movements within the NMU. Real union organization of the East and Gulf coasts is a burning necessity.

The conditions won by the Firemen and Sailors on the West Coast show the way to their brothers in the East. A national organization of Seamen based on a fighting, class-struggle program, can and must be built.

### LOCAL NEW YORK

All members of Local New York and the YPSL are instructed to attend an important membership meeting, Thursday, April 25, 8 p.m. sharp, Beethoven Hall, 210 E. 5th St., N.Y.C.

## Way Is Now Open For Renewing Drive in Steel

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio, April 21—More than 2,500 steel workers with their wives and children crowded into the Central Auditorium on Sunday afternoon and many more hundreds stood outside listening to the report of Philip Murray, chairman of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee on the Supreme Court decision in the famous Republic Steel case. Murray reached the high point of his speech in a declaration that the SWOC will now put on a new organization drive which will not cease "until every last steel worker in every last steel mill in this country is a member of the SWOC."

The Supreme Court decision means that the Republic Steel Corporation must reinstate 5,000 men whom it had discharged for union activity, pay them \$5,000,000 in back wages, disband the company unions, and cease interfering with the workers' right to join a union of their own choosing. Thus ended the famous Republic Steel case, three years after the bloody Little Steel strike. In order to advance from this point on, it is, however, necessary to recall the events of the Little Steel strike and learn its lessons.

### Why Little Steel Was Lost

Seventy thousand men in seven states were on strike in 1937, 35,000 on strike in the Mahoning Valley alone. The truck drivers of Youngstown went on a three day sympathy strike when the troops came in. The rubber workers of Akron came down in hundreds of cars to aid in the struggle, mine workers joined too. The tremendous might of labor united and fighting was shown in that strike. Why was it lost?

The steel workers will forget only at the cost of further defeats how the SWOC leadership foolishly placed so much faith in Governor Davey during the 1937 Little Steel strike, and asked for the National Guard to be sent in to "preserve order." The troops came in—and in two days opened the mill gates and escorted scabs in armed trucks through the picket lines. Can any steel worker forget that? There are those who would like to pass over this misleadership of a great strike, but the steel workers cannot afford to let these gentlemen do it. The martyrs of the Memorial Day Massacre, of the Poland Avenue riots, of the Massillon and Canton terror, will not be really avenged unless the steel union risks itself of any ideas that government institutions deal out even-handed justice.

The 1937 strike was lost because the leaders of the SWOC failed to prepare it. They rejected the policy of militant strike struggle which alone can win conditions for the workers, and instead lobbied in Washington and in Columbus, spending most of their time "around the conference table." They failed to give union publicity to the strike and didn't even issue a strike bulletin or paper. They held no mass meetings, except on the picket lines, and no parades. They tried to run the strike from the top and didn't even elect a strike committee from the ranks of the workers. To top it all off, they relied on Governor Davey and called in the troops.

Will it be different in the future? The meeting on Sunday showed that the leadership of the SWOC learned little. The meeting was occupied with lengthy preliminaries in which the leaders praised each other in the most extravagant manner. The most disgusting point was reached when John Owens, President of the United Mine Workers of Ohio, in haranguing the audience about his own self sacrifice and about the fine qualities of Philip Murray who "was placed on earth to serve humanity", finally burst out with the statement that he and the workers in the audience "are happy to be sitting at the feet of this great character, this Christian gentleman, Philip Murray."

No place on the speakers' list was provided for the leaders in the plants, who kept every last SWOC lodge in existence during these three years after the defeat.

### Questions That Must Be Answered

Philip Murray in his speech took up the question of unemployment which has become a chronic condition in steel more than anywhere else, and shouted "what is Congress going to do about it?" But he himself said nothing in regard to what labor should do about it, and was silent on the question of the 30 hour week, which could be a real step in decreasing unemployment.

In his call for an organization drive in the mills Murray warned against wild cat strikes and strikes in general, saying "go back to the mills, sign up the workers in the union and then come and put it up to me and see what I'm going to do about it." He assured the workers that he, Murray, will take care of their problems for them, will negotiate contracts for them, and will not leave them in the lurch.

In order to take advantage of the Supreme Court decision to gain real conditions for the steel workers, the steel workers must make the SWOC their own union, a democratic union. It must be based on a militant program which relies only on labor's strength.

It must place no reliance on government agencies and on government officials. The union must prepare not only for the conference table but for the serious battles that must come on the picket line in the strikes. Only along these lines will the organization drive succeed.

## MAY DAY CELEBRATION IN YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

"WORLD SOCIALISM OR WORLD WAR" will be the subject of an address by David Stevens, Youngstown District Organizer of the S.W.P., at the May Day Celebration to be held on Wednesday, May 1st, 8:00 p.m., at 123½ E. Federal St., Youngstown, Ohio.

The celebration will include other brief talks, a dance, refreshments, entertainment and revolutionary workers songs.

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