

The Negro Struggle

By ALBERT PARKER

The Hampton Institute Conference

To understand what happened at the much publicized Conference on the Participation of the Negro in National Defense, held last week at Hampton Institute, Va., it is necessary to understand the reason the conference was held and the things it set out to do.

As a full page advertisement of the Institute put it, "Defense Conference Marks New Era. Symbolic of a new era ahead for Hampton was the two day conference...Nationally known authorities, both Negro and white, concentrated their thoughts on specific programs of both immediate and long time value on how the Negro may best serve the country in the interests of total defense and national unity. Their discussions covered comprehensive subjects—Military and Naval Defense, Industry, Family Life, Labor, The Consumer, Youth, Education, Business, The Press, Morale and Mental Hygiene, Agriculture, Public Health, Housing, Recreation and Religion..."

It should be clear from the above statement that these "nationally known authorities" were interested in "serving the country"—i.e., the bosses of this country—not in serving the interests of the Negro people who get such a raw deal in this country.

That the government itself did not see in this body any serious threat to its publicly announced and carefully worked out policies of Jim Crowism in the armed forces was made clear in the statement of Roosevelt himself, the author and executor of these policies:

"It is heartening to know that in this time of stress and strain, when the whole nation is engaged in a mighty effort to gird itself against any challenge which a mad world may hurl at it, you...are to hold a two-day conference on the participation of the Negro in national defense... There could be no finer manifestation of the loyalty of the Negro, no more fitting re-dedication of himself to the cause of America, than the conference which you are holding."

This is Roosevelt's nice and flowery way of saying: Go ahead, hold your conference, it will be heartening to me because by and large what you will do will help to get the Negroes to support my war program.

Whitewashing the Bosses

The highlight of a speech by Aubrey Williams was an attempt to set the Negro against the trade union movement:

"Look at the Negro in the labor field. Negro youth is faced with the same difficulties that white youth faces, but added to these are the prejudiced barriers set up by many employers and the discriminatory practices set up by the labor and trade unions. What is the result? Only 2% get skilled jobs as against 8% for white youth—less than 10% get semi-skilled jobs against 20% for white youth. And when they do get full-time jobs, the Negro youth averages 49 hours a week for a wage of \$8.75, while the white youth averages 44 hours for a wage of \$15.71."

Williams thus places the full blame for industrial discrimination against Negroes on the union movement as such, without bothering to indicate that this is not true of the CIO movement, and not true about many AFL unions. In this way, he whitewashes the forces chiefly responsible for discrimination in industry: the bosses who own and control the factories that Jim Crow or exclude colored workers. And he whitewashes the government which, if it wanted to, could easily have passed a law denying war contracts to those factories that discriminate against Negroes.

Yes, some trade union leaders are guilty of Jim Crowism, and we of the Socialist Workers Party have pointed out again and again that this can be corrected only by persistent and organized action of the progressive white and Negro members of the union movement.

Williams has a lot of nerve talking about someone else when he himself enforces a policy of segregation in the NYA, of which he is administrator, a policy which sets up "white projects" and "Negro projects" and does not permit mixing of the two races on any NYA project, even in the North where many of the white and Negro youth whom he separates used to attend school together.

"The Nationally Known Authorities"

As for the round-table sessions of the "authorities," they were not much better.

As an example, consider the "authorities" scheduled to sit and solve the problems of the Negro on "Industry and Labor":

One administrative assistant of the National Defense Advisory Commission; one superintendent of the Ford Industrial School; one director of the Department of Social Sciences, Fisk University; one representative of Hampton Institute; three officials of the Urban League; one race relations officer, Personnel Division, Federal Works Agency; and one representative of the Bureau of Employment Security.

That means: zero representatives of the trade union movement, and zero working men or women, present.

Yet, whatever else it might do or avoid doing, however much it might desire to curry favor with Roosevelt, there was one thing this conference could not avoid doing, and which served to expose Roosevelt: it had to adopt a resolution opposing Roosevelt's anti-Negro policy in the armed forces and to ask for an end to certain phases of policy. It wasn't a very strong resolution; on the contrary, it was weak, inadequate and vague—but it shows up Roosevelt because he will not let Jim Crow in the armed forces.

(Another article on the Hampton Conference will appear next week.)

They Have Their Plattsburgs

It's Time the Workers Got Wise, and Demanded WORKERS' Plattsburgs

By EUGENE VARLIN

Any draftee can safely trade his chances of gaining an officer's berth for a nickle beer without feeling he has tossed away any reasonable, or even probable, opportunity.

The present officer selection system embodies in a perfected form the methods developed during the World War period. Of the 156,000 commissioned officers who ruled this army in 1917-18, only 16,000 came from the draftee ranks, and most of these were carefully selected on the usual army criteria of "superior"

education, "proper" background, and "leadership" experience (petty bosses in civil life). The odds against any drafted worker getting out of the class of those who shine the second-lieutenant's boots are many thousand to one.

The ruling class, two years before America's entry into the last war, had already established the plan for a sufficient supply of boss-minded officers despite any sudden and huge expansion of the army. This was the Plattsburg Camp movement, which on a national scale became the Military Training Camps Association.

A CLASS ORGANIZATION

The Plattsburg camps, or as the War Department now frankly terms them, the "Business Men's Training Camps," were and are a private system of military training camps run by and for business men, with the material aid and official endorsement of the War Department.

It is from these private training camps, limited exclusively to members of the boss class, that the bulk of the officers for the new draft army will come. On August 11, in a message to the largest camp group at Plattsburg, N. Y., from which the movement as a whole derives its name, President Roosevelt made clear the central role of these camps as a source of officer personnel, when he stated that "On the foundation of the Plattsburg camps of 1915 was built the structure of those camps of instruction which served so successfully to provide the officers essential for the manning of our World War forces two years later."

Roosevelt was referring to the Officers Training Camps, modeled on Plattsburg, and which provided 60% of officers in the last war.

The Plattsburg camp idea was first proposed in 1915 by the notorious reactionaries, Cornelius H. Wickersham, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and Hamilton Fish, Jr., in a meeting at the exclusive Harvard Club.

Foreseeing America's entry into the war, and the expansion of the armed forces far beyond the point where West Point and the small Regular Army could supply sufficient "reliable" officers, the first concern of these gentlemen was to assure an adequate supply of boss-class officers.

In a pamphlet published by the Military Training Camps Association in 1916, the purpose and role of these camps was clearly indicated: "The success of... last summer's camps at Plattsburg for business and professional men has demonstrated the effectiveness of a short and intensive course of military training in helping to qualify educated men to fill the great deficiency in commissioned officers that would arise in case of national emergency."

The bankers and bosses everywhere were quick to grasp the idea, and camps like the one at Plattsburg were soon established throughout the country.

REVIVED IN 1940 FOR THE SAME PURPOSE

The Military Training Camps Association, organized in February 1916 by the veterans of the first Plattsburg camp, continues today as a powerful quasi-military

organization. Its membership now consists of 65,000 officers, including those it trained during the World War. Although nominally a private organization, it functions entirely in conjunction with the War Department.

The revival of the Plattsburg camps in preparation for the coming war was announced by the War Department on June 15. The *New York Times* headlined the announcement, "Army Training Camp Movement, which on a national scale became the Military Training Camps Association."

The boss class rallied at once. Applications for admission to the camp at Plattsburg, N. Y., poured in.

On June 19, the *N. Y. Times* wrote of these boss-class recruits: "An expressed recognition of the danger now facing an unprepared United States brought them from banks, brokerage houses, public offices, the bench, industries, law firms, and universities, in a sort of patriotic 'Who's Who'."

A "CROSS-SECTION" — BUT NO WORKERS

"Those who applied," reported the *Times* on June 22, "continued

to represent a cross-section of American life—bankers, brokers and clerks, physicians, lawyers, writers, craftsmen, and scholars." A cross-section of American life—without a single worker or farmer!

The Military Training Camps Association leaves nothing to chance when it comes to the selection and approval of applicants. It operates on a plan of selection which it terms "impartial." Three men of wide business and military experience review the applications.

This "impartial" plan of selection was described by the *N. Y. Times*, June 20, as follows: "The selection of successful applicants (was) prescribed by the War Department solely on the basis of their education, their experience, and their leadership in business, professional or labor fields, 'as evidenced by their positions.'"

The "impartiality" of the plan consisted of the technical inclusion of "labor leaders." But even a Bill Green or a Matthew Woll would have been as acceptable as Uncle Tom at a dinner of Southern Bourbons.

Almost all the successful applicants were college graduates, the continuation of the tradition established by the first Plattsburg camp in 1915. Harvard, Yale and Princeton, the most exclusive of the colleges, provided the largest percentage.

PLATTSBURG "DEMOCRACY"—IT'S ALL IN FUN

Training at the revived Plattsburg camp began on July 6.

The *N. Y. Times* correspondent wrote, "The idea of a son of the Rockefeller making his own bed, a United States justice peeling potatoes, a college professor waiting on table and a high-goal polo player polishing his own shoes may sound rather fanciful, but this all took place..." And in the presence of photographers, of course. It was all a lot of fun, like a combined Boy Scout camping trip and slum tour. In the army, of course, these gentlemen, as officers, will have the workers to do the dirty work.

The theme of "democracy" received quite a play in this same *Times* article. The Plattsburg camps are described as "the greatest leveler democracy can produce... Living, sleeping and eating with men... (whose) thoughts and civil viewpoint may be the diametrical opposite of yours... all adds up to the greatest game of give-and-take this world knows."

Just how far this "give-and-take" extended was described in the *Christian Science Monitor* Weekly of Aug. 24 as follows: "Little trouble was had. One agitator with ideas which swung widely to the left... was quickly eliminated. A couple of 'fellow travelers' who had gotten into the camp by misrepresentation were given an immediate drumhead court martial by their tentmates and that settled their status." The greatest leveler democracy can produce!

Such are the men and the class who will rule the draft army. Bosses and labor-haters, to whom

the lives and welfare of the common soldiers mean less than dirt.

Their only qualifications for leading men under conditions of war is their training in exploiting labor.

THEY HAVE THEIR CAMPS; LET'S HAVE OURS!

Any ordinary worker, trained on the picket lines of the class struggle, is a thousand times more qualified to lead workers under conditions of war than any capitalist boss. And infinitely more qualified, by virtue of mechanical training and machine work, to operate and direct modern military weapons and equipment.

Just as the bosses have their own private military training and officers training camps, so the workers must demand and establish their own military training system, controlled and directed by their own organizations, the trade unions.

Just as the workers oppose boss exploitation in industry, so they must fight against boss exploitation in the military sphere.

Under conditions of universal militarism, war and capitalist reaction, it would be foolish for the workers to scorn military training and modern arms. But so long as the bosses run the army, it will be used in their interests and against the workers.

We can take a lesson from the boss class however. They have their Plattsburgs. We, the working class, must have our Plattsburgs. — Workers Plattsburgs — under the control of the Trade Unions!

An Indictment Of Jim Crow in Army and Navy

Dr. Milton R. Konvitz has written an extremely timely and pointed article, "The Legal Status of the Negro in the New Army" which has been issued by Contemporary Law Pamphlets of the New York University School of Law as a press release in mimeographed form. The article certainly deserves to be published and widely distributed as a pamphlet.

Konvitz demonstrates that the appointment of Benjamin O. Davis as a brigadier-general, rather than being an indication of the "democratic" nature of the army and navy, "is another instance of our traditional practice; namely, to single out an individual for honors, at the same time to keep the mass of Negroes in inferior status or suppressed."

To prove this point, he takes up the history and nature of the two amendments to the Selective Service Act which are supposed to prohibit discrimination because of race or color, and shows how ineffective and disregarded they are while the three chief types of Jim Crowism are continued in the armed forces.

The first type is segregation, the establishment of separate regiments in many branches of the service. The second is discrimination as to placement, so that the Negroes get the worst possible jobs. The third is the "numerus clausus" practice.

Courts Won't Stop Jim Crow

In his discussion of the first example, Konvitz deals a death-blow to the idea current among some Negro organizations that "taking the matter to court" can in any way help to solve the problem.

He shows that Negroes are promised they will get aviation training, when they get it, through the "formation of colored aviation units," and that the White House has stated, "Negro organizations will be established in each major branch of the service, combatant as well as non-combatant."

He then asks: "Is segregation in the armed forces discrimination in violation of the Act and Constitution?"

"An unsophisticated person would without hesitation say 'yes.' When he reads in the papers about separate benches for Jewish students in some European universities, he knows that segregation is intended as, and is, discrimination. But one who knows the decisions and opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States will need to say 'no.' The Court has held that Jim Crow laws, segregating Negroes in public conveyances, and that laws providing for separate educational facilities, are constitutional."

Konvitz cites the well-known case of *Gaines v. Canada*, "decided at the end of 1938 by a liberal majority," which held that the Negro petitioner could attend the school "in the absence of other and proper provisions." "The opinion was so written as to make the decision seem to be a great victory for the Negro race; and the fact that McReynolds and Butler dissented also tended to make the decision seem a gain for the liberal forces. As a matter of fact, however, the decision took two steps backward for one step forward, for it upheld the constitutionality of segregation, mitigated only by the requirement that proper facilities within the state need to be provided for qualified Negroes."

Army is Law Unto Itself

Konvitz's discussion of the second type of discrimination is well-known to readers of the Socialist Appeal, especially as reflected in the stories we have been carrying on the U. S. S. Philadelphia case.

"Since the military arm is well-nigh autonomous," he points out, "it is difficult to conceive of legal means to eradicate these forms of discrimination. The provision in the Draft Act that no man shall be inducted for training and service 'unless and until he is acceptable to the land and naval forces for such training and service' vests unlimited discretion in the military and naval authorities. That the forms of discrimination referred to are abuses of discretion is apparent; but they are probably *damnum absque injuria*, injuries without remedies."

Konvitz's discussion of the third type of Jim Crowism is one, as he points out, which has received very little attention, although it is a very important point. The White House laid down the procedure: "The strength of the Negro personnel... will be maintained on the general basis of proportion of the Negro population of the country." That is, since 9% of the population is colored, 9% of the armed forces will be colored too.

Roosevelt Imitates Hitler

"It is amazing that these announcements aroused scarcely any protest. Here is an importation of the the *numerus clausus* practice from Europe, a practice made notorious toward the end of the Nineteenth Century when the Czarist government fixed a quota to govern the admission of Jews to the Russian universities and schools of higher learning. That this practice is a denial of the very essence of democracy is in part shown by the fact that every anti-Semitic government has made use of it."

"Very quietly this obnoxious practice has been introduced in the United States, in the very institution created to defend our democracy. It is wrong in itself and as a precedent, dangerous to everyone who can be identified as a member of a racial or religious minority, and to every American who prizes his heritage of freedom and equality. The practice is as indefensible as it is unprecedented (as a governmental policy), yet I know of no legal measure that might be taken to stop it."

All in all, this pamphlet is very helpful toward an understanding that "legal means" will very probably do nothing to help the problem. What is required is the struggle which our party has outlined: for trade union control of military training.

Stalin Purges His Playwrights

Writing Plays In Stalin's Domain Is Dangerous Occupation

By JOHN G. WRIGHT

The new, silent purge is pruning the ranks of the Kremlin's most pampered and fabulously-paid servants—"the creative artists." Dramatists and scenario writers have suffered the heaviest casualties.

Apparently the formulas for the 1940 edition of the purge vary depending upon the individuals and circumstances involved. Thus the Komsomol and Trade Union bureaucracies were decimated under the formula of *bezdelniki* and *darmoyedniki* (loafers, scoundrels who eat the bread they haven't earned). But the formula for the intellectuals is: *klevetniki* (slanders). Trotsky suggested that the epoch of Soviet Thermidor will go

into history of artistic creation, pre-eminently as an epoch of mediocrities, laureates and toadies. According to Stalin, the designation should be corrected to read—slanders.

The slanderer of the month (October) is one S. Kolkov, author of a play entitled, "The Kovrov Family." This play was staged by the Gorki State Theatre, the initial performances were greeted with ecstatic, if stereotyped, reviews, scores of other theatres rushed production plans—when suddenly Kolkov's masterpiece was deflated. On October 13 *Pravda* indicted his play as "Slander Against the Soviet Family," damned the Gorki Theatre for befouling its stage with it, and generally berated all the "responsible" people for approving its production. Not one among them, lamented *Pravda*, showed "the least sign of political perspicacity, not one saw in this play falsehood and distortion of Soviet reality."

Pravda dwells in detail on Kolkov's opus. The main characters in the play are Kovrov, engineer and party member; his wife, Olga Alexandrovna, a party member;

their ten year old son, Mitya, whom they both love passionately. The parents squabble all the time, especially over the upbringing of their boy. Mitya, spoiled by his mother, neglects his studies, but father always get glowing reports about his son's progress in school. A crisis ensues when Kolkov learns on returning from a prolonged stay in the provinces that Mitya has been kept back another year in the same grade. His wife utilizes the opportunity for carrying out a long contemplated plan. Gathering her possessions and Mitya she leaves Kovrov in favor of a mutual friend, the jurist Borovsky, another party member, and this newly constituted family immediately "departs to a summer resort." Kolkov falls ill from worry about the education of his son. End of Act One.

The next scene takes place in a courtroom. In it Kovrov delivers a very long speech which obviously exasperated *Pravda*. He "lashes as un-Soviet the educational methods of child raising followed by Olga Alexandrovna, he talks at length about Communist views on the family... in short, proves his rights to the child." "Kovrov's 'eloquence,'" continues *Pravda* sarcastically, "fails to sway the court." The judge interrogates the child, Mitya, it appears, would prefer to live with both his father and mother. Whereupon the court dismisses Kovrov's plea and rules that the boy must remain with his mother.

In the third act Mitya degenerates completely. He longs for his father, associates with street children, and stops attending school altogether. He becomes ruder and ruder to group-ups, acts like a hoodlum on the street, and learns to steal. Even his mother begins to worry.

Meanwhile her lover Borovsky gets bored with her worries, and still more with her personally. "It seemed to me," sums up the jurist, Borovsky, "that I loved her a lot. But once we started living together I suddenly sensed that it wasn't so. I don't love her at all." Mitya decides to run away with a homeless waif who has become his pal and preceptor; but in trying to board a train, he slips, falls under the wheels, and is killed. The lone witness of Mitya's tragic end is his faithful nurse, who runs after him, calls out to him, but cannot catch him. Curtain.

In writing this problem-play, Kolkov, the author, obviously felt himself a champion of the "Soviet Family," and must have made sure of adhering rigidly to the line of "Bolshevik self-criticism" as laid down by *Pravda*. It is equally unquestionable that the innumerable right-thinking and "responsible" people who passed the script viewed it in the same highly moral light. *Pravda* itself not so very long ago featured much more embarrassing family complications and used to write editorials on education from which Kolkov's hero undoubtedly quoted wholesale. In vain! By the time Kolkov had finished his play, antechambered all the people who mattered, obtained all the indispensable approvals, in short by the time his play reached the stage, life and its problems had altered beyond recognition, at least in *Pravda's* eyes.

New policies demand new plays. Small wonder, that Kolkov's play is, as the French say mildly, *mal à propos* (evil to the purpose). For instance, the prominent characters are mostly married party members, and at the same time all the families in the play without exception break up. Even Gavrik, the homeless waif, is a by-product of a broken home. His father committed suicide out of "sexual jealousy." Kolkov surpassed himself in inventing so plausible and yet so original, almost poetic, an explanation for the presence of a homeless waif on a Soviet stage, but even this superb stroke failed in his downfall. "Let us grant," *Pravda* comments cautiously, "that there is such a family, maybe more than one. But when a family of this sort is taken apart from the entire surrounding reality one obtains a false-may, worse than that!—a vicious generalization, a slander against the Soviet family."

Kolkov's real sin, however, is not in failing to counterbalance an aborted family with an idyllic couple and a budding Stalin. He made his mistake in centering his play on the educational problem, which *Pravda* belligerently points out is a "problem of great state importance."

Sons and daughters of workers and peasants had just been driven from the Soviet schools to form an industrial labor reserve. Only the Mityas, i. e., the children of the privileged, can now attend school, because their parents alone can pay the tuition. All the state resources were being mobilized in October to educate the populace to understand the historical significance of this latest victory. The Presidium of the C.C.T.U. convened in solemn session and resolved:

"The trade union organizations must explain to the workers, the state employees, and members of their families the significance of an organized preparation of cadres of new workers from among the urban and kolkhoz youth, and the creation

Unions Back Campaign For Refugee Relief

A joint campaign to aid political refugees is now being conducted by the International Relief Association and the New World Resettlement Fund.

The International Relief Association is the oldest anti-fascist labor relief organization in this country. For fourteen years it has rendered invaluable service to anti-fascist fighters abroad. It is now helping politically endangered refugees in Sweden, France, Portugal to get visas for countries on this side of the Atlantic; providing them with the necessary funds for travel; and sending them monthly aid.

Almost all of these refugees have no other organization to help them. They are the ordinary humble people, penniless, unknown, but the most courageous fighters against reaction. The I.R.A. takes pride in helping these brave men and women whose records in their native lands and in emigration entitle

them to more than a concentration camp in France or Germany. Charles A. Beard is honorary chairman of the I.R.A.; Freda Kirchwey its treasurer.

The New World Resettlement Fund is working to resettle the families of Spanish anti-Fascists, now interned in France, in a cooperative colony it has established in Ecuador. Oswald Garrison Villard is National Chairman; Margaret DeSilver Treasurer of the Fund.

This campaign is endorsed and supported by many leading trade-unions, including the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, ILGWU, and by fraternal organizations such as the Workmen's Benefit Fund.

The anti-fascist refugees belong at the head of every Christmas list. Send contributions care of George Novack, Joint Campaign for Political Refugees, Room 405, 2 West 43rd Street, New York City.