

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1984

Note to our readers

At a Jan. 1 expanded Resident Editorial Board Meeting the following resolution was passed:

"That the Black and proletarian dimensions of our movement continue to be represented on the front page of N&L in the form of two new columns to begin in the January-February 1984 issue: one entitled "Workshop Talks," to be written by Felix Martin and John Marcotte; the other entitled, "Black World," to be written by Lou Turner."

Black World

Significance of Marcus Garvey study

by Lou Turner

The publication of the first two volumes of the massive Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers in November, 1963, is a momentous event in the historiography of Garveyism. The Marcus Garvey Papers Project, supported by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, is under the editorship of Prof. Robert A. Hill, the director of the Project at the University of California at Los Angeles.

The entire collection of over 30,000 documents, memorabilia and interviews with original Garveyites from many countries gathered by Prof. Hill is due to be published in ten large volumes. Six volumes will contain documents on Garveyism in the U.S., two volumes on the movement in the Caribbean and Latin America, and two volumes on Africa. The first two volumes just off the press contain a total of some 1,500 pages, including Prof. Hill's overview of the whole collection, to which we will return.

THREE HISTORIC CRISES

The most exciting aspect of the collection is that we get to hear Marcus Garvey speak for himself so that the reader can both view Garvey in his own time and historical setting and judge for himself what Garvey's relevance is for our day.

Three historic crises from two quite different historic periods show the relevance that the Garvey Papers have for

our day. The first crisis arose in the period between the 1917 East St. Louis anti-Black pogrom and the "Red Summer of 1919" when race riots swept the country and the infamous Palmer raids that J. Edgar Hoover spearheaded against "subversives" gave the Garvey movement its first impetus as it caught a new stage of Black consciousness.

Against the backdrop of these racial crises Garvey's appeal to the Black masses declared: "America, that has been ringing the bells of the world, proclaiming to the nations and the peoples thereof that she has democracy to give to all and sundry . . . has herself no satisfaction to give 12,000,000 of her own citizens . . . over the brutal murder of men, women and children for no other reason than that they are black people seeking an industrial chance in the country that they have laboured for three hundred years to make great."

The second period discloses how very different is the understanding of Marcus Garvey by a generation like that of the 1960s versus the attitude of Black intellectuals in Garvey's time. Where an intellectual like W.E.B. DuBois helped to railroad Garvey out of the country, it was the Black power generation of the 1960s which revived Garvey, although doing so without fully breaking from the "talented tenth" elitism of DuBois, who Garvey fought.

And thirdly, what emerged with the world ferment following the Russian Revolution led Lenin to recognize in national democratic movements in imperialist lands such as Garvey's, a new dialectic of liberation. In turn, Garvey had himself recognized that "Bolshevism . . . is going to spread until it finds a haven in the breasts of all oppressed peoples, and then there shall be a universal rule of the masses." Later, at the time of Lenin's death Garvey was led to eulogize him as "the world's greatest man between 1917 and 1924."

The point is that as against American Marxists, Black and white, Lenin was virtually alone among Marxists of the period who saw the revolutionary dimension of Garvey and the movement he led.

This inescapable "Red dimension" of the Garvey Papers brings us back to Prof. Hill's introductory overview to the whole ten volume collection. The comprehensiveness of Prof. Hill's grasp of the documents can be found not alone in his overview, but is seen as well in the scholarly Pan-African biographical sketches appended to Volume I and in his quite erudite footnotes to both volumes. One of the new

*The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume I, 1826-August 1919; Volume II, 27 August 1919-31 August 1920. Edited by Robert Hill, University of California Press, 1963.

insights into the historiography of Garveyism that Prof. Hill documents is the parallel between Garveyism and Irish nationalism.

It is precisely such creative scholarship that then makes it difficult to comprehend why, in his overview, Prof. Hill didn't fully bring in the impact of the Russian Revolution upon Garvey which the documents themselves point to. In being critical of Black "talented tenth" solutions to the Negro question, Garvey was not afraid of "Red" when it meant masses in motion. Nor is it a question of disregarding the contradictions in Garvey, which makes it all the more imperative to finally examine the dialectic of Garveyism as a Black world movement from practice.*

Just as anyone seriously looking for the key to Garveyism's emergence out of the triangular movement of Black thought and revolution between the U.S., Caribbean and Africa cannot ignore the actual writings of Garvey's Negro World as presented so magnificently in these two volumes, so must there be as well a grappling with the birth of Black Marxism in the U.S., its relation to the Russian Revolution and to the writings of Marx. Only then can we fully pursue the dialectics of Black self-determination both as it arose historically and as it impacts upon the world today.

The originality, organizational capacity and inexhaustible posing of the question of the Black dimension as world civilization, as international dimension, is to be found within the documents of the Garvey movement. That is what brings Garvey to life. That international dimension of Garvey's Negro World, his seeking the Black question as a world question, is part of what impelled us to name this new column Black World. For Marxist-Humanism the Black dimension, as Black masses as vanguard of the American Revolution, of Black as a world color of revolution, has been an integral part of our four decades of development. That is what we hope to present in this column in the period ahead.

(To be continued)

*For a view of the development of the American roots of Marxism in relationship to the Black question see the 4th expanded edition of American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard. A quite important work on Garvey and UNIA is Tony Martin's Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Greenwood Press, 1978. Especially relevant to this point is Ch. 10, pp. 221-272.

MARCH, 1984

Black World

Significance of Marcus Garvey study

by Lou Turner
Part II

No doubt, Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga's "unusual request" that the Reagan Administration grant a pardon to Marcus Garvey, 57 years after J. Edgar Hoover succeeded in falsely indicting him on charges of mail fraud, appeared to come out of nowhere on Oct. 17. However, because the Reagan Administration's lies multiplied so rapidly following its invasion of Grenada, the New York Times Oct. 18 article on Seaga's "unusual request" went unnoticed.

Seaga's big lie about wanting a pardon for Garvey was designed to divert attention away from a more fantastic truth. Three days after the house arrest of Maurice Bishop and two days before Reagan set in motion plans to invade Grenada, Seaga made his "unusual request" to no one less than the Vice President of the United States, George Bush, who was in Jamaica for "talks" with Seaga. The only indication we have that those "talks" between Seaga and the former head of the CIA may, in fact, have been sealing the fate of the Grenadian revolution was the observation by Francis X. Clines in his Oct. 18 NYT article that "Mr. Seaga presented his request in the context of some sensitive international politics."

That the reactionary Seaga would, in 1984, invoke the memory of Garvey after aiding Reagan's imperialist intervention into the Caribbean has nothing to do with the revolutionary movement that Garvey led in the 1920s. It is intended to dispel the portent of revolution that Grenada symbolizes today.

In the first part of this column (January-February, 1984 N&L) we began a presentation of the "Red dimension" in the Marcus Garvey Papers which are in the process of being published as a massive ten-volume collection under the editorship of Professor Robert Hill. Our concentration there was on Garvey's relation to the Russian Revolution. In this column we wish to extend that Red dimension to see how both Marx and Garvey viewed the Jamaican peasantry as part of the revolutionary dimension of the Black world.

MARX, AND THE JAMAICAN PEASANTRY

When Marx wrote to Engels in 1865 on his work on Capital, he singled out the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica and its bloody suppression by British imperialism. Marx wrote: "The Jamaican business is characteristic of that dirty dog, the 'true Englishman' -- who has nothing to reproach the Russians with. But, as the brave Times says... they (the Jamaicans) enjoyed the liberty to be bled dry with taxes in order to provide the planters the wherewithal to import coolies, and thus to drive their own labor market below the minimum... Nothing was lacking to totally unmask English hypocrisy but the Irish affair and the Jamaica butcheries, hard on the heels of the American war!"

Black revolt in the West Indies becomes part of the history surrounding and sending out impulses to Marx who in the mid-1860s radically restructured Capital under the impact of the American Civil War.

Seven years earlier Marx had written in the Grundrisse (his 1857-58 notebooks for Capital): "the Quashees (the free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and alongside this 'use value', regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good... they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations, but rather observe the planters' impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure... They have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage laborers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of direct forced labour, slavery, or indirect forced labour, wage labour."

GARVEY, THE PEASANTRY AND AFRICA

A little more than half a century later Garvey, in challenging the cultured elite to confront Jamaica's peasant reality, told them to "Go into the country parts of Jamaica and

you see there
villainy of a
large percentage
of our people and
we, the few of cul-
tured tastes, can
in no way save the
race from injury
in a balanced
comparison with
other people, for
the standard of
races or of any
thing else is not
arrived at by the
few who are al-
ways the excep-
tions, but by the
majority. Thus,
we can see that
what may appear
as a superficial
opinion of Gar-
vey's concerning the Caribbean peasantry is, in truth, an
embryonic philosophy of liberation.

Professor Hill in his Introduction to the Garvey Papers
calls attention to the roots of Garveyism in the independent
Caribbean peasantry: "The dominant social consciousness
of the Caribbean was the special creation and possession of
a fiercely proud and independent peasantry. As the black
majority, their real achievement throughout the post-
emancipation period was the development of a dynamic
and expanding peasant economy that, in some places, even
challenged the dominance of the plantation system."

Among the dimensions which give a todayness to Garvey
is what our age allows us to see like no other, namely, that
the Third World revolutions have brought onto the world
historic stage what earlier Marxists had previously subor-
dinated -- the peasantry. It is now evident that in singling
out the proletariat in developed lands, Marx had also view-
ed the Black peasantry as a revolutionary force as he traced
the continuous revolt against capitalism in its colonial
periphery.

It is this appreciation for the Black dimension including
the Black peasantry which makes for an affinity of ideas
between Marx's Marxism and Garveyism. It is not that
they were by any means one and the same, nor that they had
the same philosophy of revolution. But, even where Garvey's
"back to Africa" scheme failed, it succeeded in showing the
profound unrest among the Black masses. It was not that
they thought they were going back to Africa. Rather, so
totally did they despair at ever achieving full democracy in
America that Black folk flocked to Garveyism.
Nevertheless, the affinity to Africa was not superficial. It
expressed the revolutionary dimension of the Black world,
one which shows its relevance to the masses today.* It is in
the sense that we seriously look forward to the publication of
the remaining volumes of the Marcus Garvey Papers.

*The relationship between Black and Red within Garveyism was not, as
Erin Foner claims in his New York Times review of the Garvey Papers,
merely "historic." It was shown last year in Africa during the Marx
Centenary, where three conferences took place in Zambia, Tanzania and
Nigeria. The Nigeria conference, numbering no less than 1000 partici-
pants, was one of the largest international commemorations of the centenary
of Marx's death. (See the September, 1982 issue of the Journal of African
Narrative, pp. 6, 177.)