

LESSONS OF THE MINERS' STRIKE AND TASKS OF THE N.M.U. AMONG NEGRO MINERS

By HARRY HAYWOOD

I.

IN evaluating the work of the Party and National Miners Union in the recent tri-state Miners Strike, particular attention must be given to the work among the Negroes.

One of the most outstanding achievements of the strike was the splendid spirit of solidarity manifested between Negro and white miners. Approximately 6,000 Negro miners were involved in the strike (nearly one-fifth of the total number of strikers). This, as has already been pointed out, was the largest number of Negroes ever involved in any organized action under the leadership of the Party and revolutionary trade unions. These Negro miners and their families displayed the greatest militancy, actively in leading capacity in all phases of strike and union activity, on the picket lines, on strike and relief committees, as officers in the union and women's auxiliaries, etc. Negro miners constituted the backbone of the strike in a number of mines.

Our principle of workingclass solidarity met with enthusiastic response on the part of the large masses of white miners. This is shown by the fact that even in locals with one or two Negro miners, these were almost invariably placed in leading positions on Strike Committees and as officers of the local unions. On the whole, the splitting tactics of the coal operators received a smashing defeat in the strike.

In developing and cementing this unity, the National Miners Union played a leading role. The fact that the strike was led by our revolutionary union, which placed in the forefront of its program, unity of white and Negro miners on the basis of a struggle for the demands of the latter, was without doubt the greatest factor contributing to this workingclass soli-

larity. From the outset the basic demand of the Negro miners, "Equal rights including wages, etc., no discrimination in work assignments," was placed forward as a main strike demand, and a constant agitation for solidarity was carried out by the union among the masses of miners.

It would be incorrect, however, to fail to recognize that this unity was to a considerable extent spontaneous; that the objective conditions in the coal fields were particularly favorable for the development of working class solidarity among the miners. The increasing starvation and slavery among miners prior to the strike has brought masses of them, both Negro and white, to regard unity in the struggle against the operators as an economic necessity. Hence their broad acceptance of our program in this respect.

The chief shortcoming of our Party and Union however, consists in the fact that we allowed the question of unity of Negro and white workers to remain too long at the elementary stage of unity in the struggle for equal rights on the job, unity as an economic necessity. In other words, we did not sufficiently politicize the strike in the direction of the struggle against Negro oppression. Concretely, Jim Crowism is rampant in many mining towns throughout the strike area. Not only are Negroes segregated in regards to residence in the company patches, and in mining towns, but they are also discriminated against in public places and institutions—restaurants, theatres, swimming pools, etc.

It is obvious that by involving the miners in actions for the smashing of Jim Crow laws and practices in the mining committees, our union could have succeeded in breaking through much of this Jim Crowism and in this manner would have found way to still broader strata of the Negro miners. Such actions could have taken the form of mass boycott of places discriminating against Negroes, the establishment of mass picketing before these places with placards containing slogans, the sending of delegations of Negro and white miners elected at protest mass meetings to local authorities demanding the cessation of these Jim Crow practices, etc., etc. The most opportune time for such actions was, when the mass movement was in full swing.

Moreover, the drawing of masses of white workers into active struggle against Jim Crowism (which is chauvinism in practice) is part and parcel of the struggle against chauvinistic tendencies among them. On the whole the organization of mass actions against local Jim-Crowism would have resulted in the raising of the whole movement to a higher political plane, and would have placed the unity of Negro and white workers on a more lasting basis. Our failure to organize such struggles resulted in the loss of a great opportunity by the Party and union for politicization of the strike in regard to the Negro question. Therefore this failure must be regarded as a major political shortcoming of the strike as a whole.

The Scottsboro and Camp Hill affairs also provided excellent issues for the politicization of the strike in regards to the struggle for Negro rights. Wherever the question was brought forth sharply, favorable results were registered by our Union, both organizationally and in increased influence. For example, a Negro miner is reported to have said that he supported our Union, not because it put forth the demand of equality for the Negro miners (pointing out that the strike-breaking U.M.W.A. also included in its constitution a clause on equality), "but because the N.M.U. fought for the release of the Scottsboro lads." Our shortcoming in this regard lies in the fact that we did not systematically organize the participation of our union in this campaign. Our activities were mostly confined to adoption of resolutions and sending of telegrams. True, special meetings were called by the I.L.D. but these meetings were badly organized and the participation of our Union was weak. (To be concluded tomorrow)

"White Chauvinism Stinks of the Slave Market"

The 100 per cent Yankee arrogance divides the American population into a series of castes, among which the Negroes constitute, so to speak, the caste of the "untouchables," who are in a still lower category than the lowest categories of human society, the immigrant laborers, the yellow immigrants, and the Indians. In all big cities the Negroes have to live in special segregated Ghettoes (and, of course, have to pay extremely high rent). In practice, marriage between Negroes and whites is prohibited, and in the South this is even forbidden by law. In various other ways, the Negroes are segregated, and if they overstep the bounds of the segregation they immediately run the risk of being ill-treated by the 100 per cent bandits. As wage earners, the Negroes are forced to perform the lowest and most difficult work; they generally receive lower wages than the white workers and do not always get the same wages as white workers doing similar work, and their treatment is the very worst. Many American Federation of Labor trade unions do not admit Negro workers in their ranks, and a number have organized special trade unions for Negroes so that they will not have to let them into their "good white society."

This whole system of "segregation" and "Jim-Crowism" is a special form of national and social oppression under which the American Negroes have much to suffer. The origin of all this is not difficult to find: this Yankee arrogance towards the Negroes stinks of the disgusting atmosphere of the old slave market. This is downright robbery and slave whipping barbarism at the peak of capitalist "culture."

—From the Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States by the Executive Committee of the Communist International, published in the February, 1931.