

BLACK PRIDE **NEWS** LETTER



THE BLACK
1619 **WORKER** **1914**

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March, 1976

allen 2X 000 Karamoko Baye 000 Benjamin Murdock 000 Hodari Mwongeza 000
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Everything is Political!

Mwaka ya maelezo ya imani/The year of ideological clarity

(AFRICA NEWS)---The Zaire government closed a compound serving as headquarters for the F.N.L.A.--the Angolan movement that had U. S. backing in its fight against the M.P.L.A. government. It said it was moving the compound's inhabitants to what it called "refugee camps." The move follows talks between Zaire President Mobutu Sese Seko and Angolan President Agostinho Neto, that resulted in Zaire's recognition of the Angolan government.

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AT THIS time there is much talk in the news media, on different sides, concerning Cuban assistance in the Angolan situation. The first thing that seems to be forgotten is the statement of solidarity that Amilcar Cabral issued during the Tri-Continental Conference, in Cuba, in 1956. Secondly, Guinea-Bissau sent workers to Cuba, later, to aid the Cubans during the cane harvest and to consolidate the practicality of that statement of solidarity. It should also be remembered by the progressive forces, and particularly conscious Afrikanamericans, that Afrikan cultural roots have real ties--irrespective of the fact that they may not have been actively nurtured for a period of time. At the November session on Human Rights in the UN, it was reported in the New York TIMES, when the U.S. put a resolution forward dealing with Political Prisoners in other countries, "the Cuban representative cited the Attica prison shooting, the Watts-riot and 'innumerable attempts' by American secret agents to assassinate Prime Minister Fidel Castro as evidence that the United States possessed no credibility to pass judgment on human-rights situations in other countries." Third World Reality is beginning to practically assert itself. It used to be overwhelmingly referred to in the western press as the so-called "third world": we said it was real. We dealt with the need to convince

through historical analyses and persuasion and practice that we were correct. The move on the part of the Cubans, in Angola, is a firm effort to practically clear the surface and concretize Third World Reality and the forward progress of Socialist development. Thus, it would appear, from our words--in the past--we would be ready to deal with the situation, with the progressive possibilities as our point of departure.

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TRENTON, N.J.--The New Jersey Supreme Court has granted a new trial for Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter and John Artis. A bail hearing was set for March 19. In overturning the 1967 conviction the court held that the defense should have been given a tape of the conversation between a Paterson police officer and two prosecution witnesses. Also, the court says, the defense should have informed that promises had been made to the witnesses. Broad popular support had pushed the Carter/Artis case before the public's eyes. It in effect ascertains, at a very basic level the potential of people's power.

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NACOGDOCHES, Tx.--A Black woman has charged in a \$1.5 million suit that a white jail trusty raped her & conspired with the county sheriff, his deputy, the police chief & a police lieutenant, to cover up the crime. Filed in federal court in Tyler, Tx., under the name of Jane Doe, to protect her from harassment, the suit charged that after she was in the county jail for a minor offense in Nov. she was assaulted sexually by 3 white inmates. The sheriff is being charged with covering up the matter by not reporting it to the district attorney. & further, he was derelict in his duty by permitting the trusty to carry keys to women's section even tho it was known that the trusty was violence prone.

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As the cover reveals, this issue of BLACK PRIDE provides a profile of The Black Worker. Our artist, Bro. Hassan, especially determined to avoid a common omission when depicting general labor; the result shows the Black Woman where she belongs & has always been: alongside her man. We feel the image appropriate not only for its historic accuracy, but also as acknowledgement of International Women's Month.

Black labor—most maligned of all contributions to American development, despite the obvious evidence that Afrikan slaves virtually built the nation. Portrayed as shiftless & lazy, incompetent & complaisant, the Black Worker has fought a long & arduous battle, a battle ranging over centuries & continuing to this very day. His immediate & expected opponent, of course, has been the Capitalist; but as Ben Murdock reveals in his article, there was & is a simultaneous struggle against those who, were they conscious, would be his objective allies. It is a sad but genuine reality, bringing to mind financier Jay Gould's boast, "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half."

Brother Murdock offers a lucid overview of a period of turmoil & tension spanning the arrival of Black indentured servants in 1619 to the outbreak of WWI, the symptomatic expression of capitalist development & expansion. His statement touches significant aspects of the general labor situation, focusing on its relationship to the newly freed slaves during the Civil War—after which, for all their fighting & dying, they remained ostracized; & points out the real function of the Emancipation Proclamation. He indicates the contradictions between North & South & shows the loss that devolves on all labor as an outgrowth of divided forces. It is a meaningful & important article which evidences the need for a clear insight into the history of U. S. labor for all who would play a part

in the struggle for liberation.

In a movement from the general to a particular, Bro. Akinshiju, taking up a recent Supreme Court decision, analyses the 50 year struggle preceding this victory for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. His sharp eye exposes such considerations as the inadvisability of working class bodies with middle-class heads, the imperative demand for Black independence in mass movement, the ideological conflict between the objectives of those with capitalist orientation as opposed to a socialist perspective, and the irreconcilability of the two.

In passing, but certainly not casually, this last article contains a particularly vivid revelation, pertinent at all times, but starkly in this time of transition. It discloses the role of women as something more than merely moral support, requiring concrete & constructive action to buttress strikes by the fledgling union. It fits perfectly with a concept expressed by Malcolm X, himself once a railroad porter: "The consciousness of a people is determined by the consciousness of its women. When the women are backward, the people are backward." The point should be well taken by our Sisters in this, their month in focus.

All in all, we hope this particular issue will inspire individual research into the Black Labor Movement specifically & labor in general. It has been said that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it; such a consequence we can well do without. Crises are rampant in America. Unemployment, housing shortages, inflation, even assassination attempts are all but the result of underlying contradictions inherent in capitalist production, a system of private ownership of the means of production, socialized production, and private appropriation of the profits thereby created. Once workers come to an understanding of their strength, once they comprehend that it is their labor

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The Black Worker: 1619 - 1914

by Ben Murdock

Let every shackle be removed from Freedom's Limb.*

Prior to the introduction of slave labor, the earliest American settlers lacked the capacity to produce a large capital surplus which could be exchanged for the goods which would enable colonial America to become a viable economic power. Karl Marx noted this point in CAPITAL, when he wrote, "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in the mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the hunting of black skins signalized the rosey dawn of the era of capitalist production... These idyllic proceedings were the chief momenta of primitive accumulation."¹ A large scale accumulation of capital was a necessary pre-condition for the emergence of both American and European capitalism, as a dominant economic force; and this accumulation was a direct result of the sweat and blood of the African people who were brought here as slaves. To use Marx's term, this phase of primitive accumulation was accomplished not only by domestic exploitation of white workers—but also, by the looting of traditional stores of non-European peoples and the fostering of a system of chattel slavery to exploit black labor.

Early America's labor market can be split into two categories, slave and wage earner. This is not to negate the fact that the early colonies had indentured servants, and other forms of contractual labor—such as debtors and prisoners. It is only to point out the two main forms of labor which existed in early America. It is within these two forms of labor that the basic socio-economic contradiction was laid, which culminated in the Civil

War. It was also within this basic contradiction, between wage and slave labor, that the early labor movement in the United States began.

The first group of Africans who were brought to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 were not slaves. They were indentured servants. Even blacks who were brought to America as slaves could at first convert to Christianity and end their bondage—which many of them did. But, between 1660 and 1682, court decisions, special laws and codes, virtually transformed all black servants into slaves. These slave codes generally provided that black people were to be slaves for life and any of their offspring were to inherit the parents' condition of servitude. These codes also prohibited marriage between races and forbade slaves from inheriting property, holding secret gatherings, being parties to contracts or suits, or engaging in certain skills. Anyone who violated these codes was subject to punishment by fine, imprisonment, whipping, and/or death.²

By 1700 there were approximately 25,000 blacks in colonial America, most of them living in the South where slave labor was more suited to plantation agriculture and slaves could be maintained at a subsistence standard of living. However, a little known fact is that during this same period many Africans who came to America brought skilled trades with them. Many of them had skills in metallurgy, woodwork, and leather. As a result, many blacks were employed in skilled trades in both the North and South during the colonial period, as well as the period following the Revolutionary War.³

Throughout this period free white craftsmen attempted to exclude

* A paraphrase of an address by Karl Marx to the First International.

blacks from skilled trades; but, skilled slave labor was cheaper and by challenging slave labor, free white labor was challenging the right of slaveowners to utilize their property, as they saw fit, at a time when slaveowners formed the elite of American society. Consequently, it was a common practice in early America to hire out slave craftsmen in the South; while in the North, where agrarian development was more diversified, the need for slaves was almost totally limited to their use as artisans, craftsmen, teamsters, longshoremen, sailors, and house servants.

Another aspect of the competition between slave and free labor was in the North, where trade and manufacturing grew—there competition between slave and free labor drove wages down. This, in turn, led many white craftsmen and mechanics in the North to join the movement to abolish slavery. This was true of some southern craftsmen too, but not to the extent of his Northern brethren. Philip S. Foner, in *ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER*, pointed out: "the opposition of white workers to the continued competition of slave labor was an important factor in ending slavery in the North."⁴

Following the Revolutionary War, many Americans in the North and South believed that the spirit of revolutionary change combined with the general economic stagnation in the south, due to the failure of tobacco, rice and indigo crops, would lead to the eventual dying out of slavery altogether. But, this did not happen.

With the invention of the cotton gin, in 1793, cotton soon became the chief cash crop in America and virtually the sole crop in the South. Hence, with the emergence of cotton as king, the demand for slaves also increased. Not even a prohibition by Congress could stop the importing of slaves and slavery began to spread its tentacles westward, into the new territories which were opening up, as old lands

became exhausted. By 1860, there were an estimated 4 million slaves living in the United States, and slavery had deep roots in the 15 southern states.⁵

Of nearly 500,000 free blacks in 1860, 238,268 were in the North and West. However, these blacks were excluded from the first trade unions which, from 1790 to the Civil war, had no free black wage earner as a member.⁶

At one time free blacks held an important economic position as skilled craftsmen and artisans, following the Revolutionary War; but, with the constant flow of immigrants, following the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, these new arrivals began to assume the jobs which free blacks once held. By 1817, the supply of skilled labor in the United States for the first time exceeded the demand; and, with the decline in the national job market, free black skilled workers also began to decline. This condition in 1851 led a black newspaper, *THE AFRICAN REPOSITORY*, to note, "it is no longer possible to see a Negro working upon a building, and rarely is he allowed to drive a cart of public conveyance. White men will not work with him."⁷

During the period prior to the Civil War, the situation for free black men in the north was so bad that according to John Hope Franklin, a noted black historian, many blacks voluntarily sold themselves back into southern slavery.⁸ Frederick Douglass even appealed to white employers to give blacks an opportunity to work at skilled trades and to become apprentices. But, Douglass' pleas fell on deaf ears. Consequently, he came out in support of blacks taking jobs as scab strikebreakers. Concerning this, Douglass wrote, "Colored men can feel under no obligation to hold out in a 'strike' with whites, as the latter have never recognized them."⁹

In the south, on the other hand, the employment picture for blacks was different. In 1860, there were

more free blacks living in the South than anywhere in the country. There were 250,787 as opposed to 238,268 in the North. According to Foner, this was mainly because in most southern cities, despite the surplus of skilled workers, free black artisans were essential to the needs of the community and in some cases free blacks did not even have any competition.¹⁰

As far as organizing black workers was concerned the three most significant things to take place were a brief period of cooperation between white and black waiters in New York City, the establishment of several benevolent societies, and the establishment of labor organizations such as the American League of Colored Laborers and the Association of Black Caulkers.

Karl Marx, in his monumental work *CAPITAL*, pointed out that the self-interest of the working class in the United States required the liberation of the black slaves.¹¹ However, during the Civil War, as well as the period immediately following it, there were few examples of enlightened white workers attempting to come to terms with the full social implications of black liberation, and as a result the entire labor movement suffered.¹²

The two dominant trends within the labor movement following the Civil War, were the organization of skilled trades and industrial unions. The former, eventually dominated by the AFL, was almost exclusive of blacks. In the case of the latter, it could not afford to ignore blacks and, consequently, assumed a more radical socialistic position with the IWW playing the dominant role in its early years.

In concrete terms then: What did the Emancipation Proclamation mean for the working class in America? When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation his immediate purpose was to deprive the South of a valuable source of manpower. No real provisions were made

for blacks following their release from chattel slavery and, during the Civil War itself, the nation was marked by pro-South anti-draft riots and mass racial unrest.

Foner has pointed out that, "at the end of the war the Senate estimated between 500,000 and 750,000 men had left northern industries to enlist in the northern army. It is likely that more than 50 percent of the North's labor supply served in the Union Army, but whatever the exact figure, more workers wore the blue uniform than members of other economic groups. Among them, though fighting in separate regiments and under white officers, were black workers. More than 186,000 Negro soldiers fought in the Northern armies, many of them escaped slaves, and their troops suffered 35 percent more casualties than any other group."¹³

At the end of the Civil War, organized labor faced a number of serious problems. With demobilization came mass unemployment, the renewal of large-scale immigration from Europe, and postwar economic depression. About this time the labor movement began to demand a fairer share of the wealth, and an eight hour workday without a decrease in pay. Trade unions also sought to strengthen their positions politically and become more involved in politics. However, on the question of accepting the freed slaves into all white labor unions, they balked. This led employers to refuse the demands of both skilled and non-skilled workers, in many cases, because they were confident that they could replace strikers with blacks at a lower wage. Therefore, instead of a concrete alliance between the former slaves and white workers, as Karl Marx and other progressive socialists foresaw, an open antagonism began between the newly emancipated slaves and the white working class, which had its genesis in the basic contradiction between the slave and the white wage earner.

The labor movement and its relationship to black people during this period can be traced through the actual involvement of blacks in the movement itself. However, in doing so, the basic agrarian nature of the black masses must be considered. During Reconstruction, as well as the reign of white terrorism which immediately followed it, the great masses of blacks continued to live basically as they always had. With the temporary military occupation of the South immediately following the war, and the establishment of the Freedman's Bureau by the government for a time, it looked as if socio-economic conditions of black people might improve. But, the federal government was not willing to take the radical step forward. Had the federal government been prepared to break up the large plantations and give the former slave the economic foothold he needed, many of the problems we have today could have been resolved. However, this was not done and consequently, blacks were left at the mercy of the Northern bankers, who controlled the South, as well as their former slavemasters, who were attempting to regain control.

Concerning the transformation of blacks from chattel slavery to sharecrop peonage and destitution, W.E.B. DuBois, in his classic work **BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA: 1860-1880**, had this to say: "It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public difference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness."¹⁴ The result of this was that the wages of both white and

black workers suffered. In this way Southern demagogues and skillful businessmen turned every labor problem into a matter of interracial jealousy and hate.

In the North, matters were not too much different. The few national labor organizations which were in existence mainly remained craft in nature. Therefore, in many cases this automatically led to the exclusion of blacks who, since colonial times, had been gradually pushed out of the skilled trades. The most notable exception of blacks in skilled trades following the Civil War were longshoremen, caulkers, moulders, engineers, painters, hodcarriers, and teamsters.

The latter trades all sent representatives to the National Labor Convention, in 1867; however, following the economic depression of the winter 1867-68, the issue of black/white unity among trade unions in the North was pushed into the background, as most unions were concerned with where to find jobs and securing an eight-hour workday. An organization which was an offshoot of the National Labor Convention, however, was the Colored National Labor Union.

The Colored National Labor Union held its first convention in 1869 and held a similar convention in 1871. Both of these conventions expressed a basically middle-class ideological line and were closely affiliated with the Republicans. In later years, Frederick Douglass came to head the CNLU—but its first leader was Isaac Meyers, a noted black labor leader, who first organized the Black Caulkers of Baltimore. In Meyers' opening address to the CNLU convention in 1871, he expressed the middle-class line of his organization's leadership. He said, "there is not a natural antagonism between capital and labor. Their relationship and interests are mutual. One cannot exist without the other."¹⁵ Meyers also, while insisting that labor had a right to

organize, tended to place his emphasis on cooperative labor organization as the best mode of organizing. Along these lines, Meyers called for black workers to pool a portion of their weekly earnings for the purpose of forming capital and entering business. However, following a split with the MLU, the ONLU functioned only a few more years, then passed out of existence.

The next significant labor group among blacks to come into being was during the 1880s and early 1890s. This was the Colored Farmer's Alliance. It was a more radical group, and at its height it claimed a membership of one million. However, following its political alliance with the Populist Movement, this group soon declined in importance and left many of its members disillusioned.

Another group around about the same time as the Colored Farmer's Alliance, on a national level, was the Knights of Labor. This group exercised tremendous influence among both white and black workers, in the North and South. At its height in 1886, the Knights had about sixty thousand blacks as members. But most blacks soon came to view the Knights of Labor as an organization which, once they became members, would segregate them and not back them up in labor disputes with white workers or employers. After many disputes and external agitation, in 1894, the Knights of Labor officially announced that the only solution for the black problem in the United States, was to raise federal funds to deport blacks to Congo Basin, Liberia, or some other part of Africa.¹⁶

By the time the American Federation of Labor came forward as the dominant labor organization, at the turn of the century, under Samuel Gompers, the Knights of Labor had declined in relative importance. The AFL, after first attempting to deal with the race question, gradually began to assume a more racist policy. Eventually, it even formed "federal unions" as a means of de-

priving blacks of equal membership rights in regular unions and thereby, tying black workers' hands, so they could not assist in strikes against white unions which were affiliated with the AFL.

The other national labor organization of importance was the United Mine Workers. It was among the first industrial unions. It also, was one of the first unions to organize blacks on an industry wide basis, in both the North and South. From its earliest period, the U.M.W. had a number of black officers and a large black membership. It even had one black officer of national standing, Richard L. Davis, who twice won election to its National Executive Board.¹⁷ But, in many respects, even the U.M.W., with its liberal attitude, failed to deal with blacks in the labor movement properly.

One later example of a labor organization which practiced racial solidarity was the Industrial Workers of the World. This organization was the most radical industrial organization of the era, and led many strikes. Spero and Harris, in their book BLACK WORKERS, estimated that, of one million memberships issued, between 1909 and 1924, "100,000 cards were issued to Negroes."¹⁸

At the eve of World War I, blacks were virtually re-enslaved in the South, via the establishment of a sharecrop economy; and in the North with exception of the I.W. and U.M.W., blacks were almost totally eliminated from organized labor. Even so, however, there still appeared a chance for labor solidarity. But, the picture soon became dim. In the South, blacks were being lynched at an all-time high, and in the North, industrial jobs were becoming scarce. Remarking on this, William L. Bulkley, one of the founders of the National Urban League, had this to say: "there seems to be a purpose to restrict the Negroes within the limits of unskilled labor, to reduce them to a state which, while not nineteenth century slavery, may be twentieth-century peonage."¹⁹ That

was America's answer to the emancipated slave.

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(AN) Mar/15--Last week, only a few days after Mozambique revealed its decision to close its border with Rhodesia, the national radio station broadcast a program of "solidarity with the Zimbabwe liberation struggle"—a program which hailed the armed struggle of Afrikans in Zimbabwe to win their freedom, just as Mozambicans had fought ten years for theirs. But despite its ideolo-

gical appeal, the decision to shut down the rail traffic from Zimbabwe to Mozambique's two ports was not an easy one for the government. FRELIMO—the Mozambican Liberation Front—which led the armed struggle, has had to make a quick transformation from guerrilla army to ruling party in the nine months since independence....the Smith regime itself has helped mobilize the Mozambican people by repeated attacks on the Mozambican border.

The March 1976 issue of *SOUTHERN AFRICA* carried President Machel's Jan. speech to the OAU, of which an excerpt follows: "Not a few times it was necessary to struggle against the labelling as intransigents which /was/ applied to us. Claims were indirectly made in this Assembly that to be revolutionary one must collaborate with the enemy. It was affirmed that to be African one must receive the enemy fraternally, and permit it to occupy and dominate us. It was theorized that the enemy had a right to invade and pillage us. We want to say that between us and the enemy there can be no compromise, however important the economic or other motives. We have 1500 km of border with the direct enemies of Africa, we have just finished ten long years of war and we affirm here that under no circumstances will we capitulate to the enemy. Our duty is to combat the enemy, our duty is to defend the people. We are Africans, Africans under attack, Africans who refuse to let themselves be intimidated in the defense of the dignity of Africa. Therefore we are with the People's Republic of Angola. This meeting which we are now ending was one in which the courage and dignity of all those who resist imperialism was affirmed." Thus, the basis was laid for the concrete move to be taken. In between then and the closing of the border, an intense education campaign was conducted so that the people would understand the reason for the move.

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1976: Court Rules Pullman Porters
Discriminated Against for Years

by Akinshiju Chinua Ola

The U.S. District Court at Denver, Colorado ruled, in February, that Pullman car porters were "bound to their jobs as porters, often doing the work of conductors but not getting the promotions or the pay due them."¹ The ruling came as the result of a lawsuit, filed against the Pullman Company in 1963. The court will determine what liability damages the company owes more than 2,000 porters, sometime in the next few months.

This ruling is the culmination of more than 50 years of struggle, and it vindicates some of the original grievances that served to launch the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in August, 1925. It also brings to mind that the organization of the porters into a union was a practical instance of "the New Negro" consciousness that was being articulated by the Harlem Renaissance writers.

The Pullman porter provides a good illustration of why the "black bourgeoisie" was functionally merely a psychological status symbol of respectability, which simply, in most cases, indicated that blacks had been "accepted" by white America to some degree. One example is the requirement that an applicant for the Pullman job had to have recommendations from two or more white people.² It was, during the 20s, "often the only job a black college graduate could land."³ In fact, one of the most vivid portraits of the railway porter is that of the highly educated Dixon, who serves as an astonishing voice for J. A. Rogers' revelations, in *FROM SUPERMAN TO MAN*. To "run on the road" meant, in the Black Community, to hold some kind of status—while, in reality, the porter himself suffered a vicious humiliation on the job. He was especially bitter about the requirement for white "recommendations".

As one of the porters, a plain-

tiff in the lawsuit, pointed out in an interview with the *TIMES* writer: "We were told to stay with the assigned car, no matter what happened." Such instructions, combined with other similar actions, drew loud complaints about company attitudes which reduced the porters to being just "part of the equipment and not men," said Leroy C. Richie, who was on the road for 26 years. For instance, a disabled car would be left on the Wyoming prairies in 30 to 40 below zero weather. With no heat in the car, "You would just have to sit tight and wait for a repair crew, even though it would sometimes take days for them to get there," said Hal Leftwich, a 35-year veteran.³

Ironically, today, the porters are critical of the Porters' union because it was ineffective in redressing many of their grievances. "But at least the union made it possible for us to confront our accusers, and it established a grievance procedure," Leftwich added. The fact that the suit was filed by the porters themselves makes it more than interesting to examine the criticism, as regards the union. The Brotherhood, it is known, had to wage an intense struggle—against the company, the exclusively white unions, and also against much of the black press. The history of that struggle's strengths also reveals its weaknesses, and provides some insight into the complications of Black leadership and the demands it entails.

In 1920, with the end of federal control of the railroads, an anti-union scheme called the Employee Representation Plan was effected to stifle the porters' attempts to organize. The plan had workers' representatives who were to mediate, in the porters' interests. It did not prohibit workers from joining any unions, but it did maintain that "the right to hire and discharge

shall be invested exclusively in the company." A discharge could be appealed to the Bureau of Industrial Relations for final decision, "but the bureau was simply the company's personnel department."⁴

Recognizing the plan for what it was, militant representatives saw the need for a righteous union. One representative heard A. Philip Randolph speak. Randolph was editor of the socialist-oriented black magazine, THE MESSENGER, and he was impressive enough to convince the porters' representative, Ashley L. Totten, that Randolph was the man to organize them. There is a curious note relating to Randolph's early connection with the American Socialist Party, as referred to by Harold Cruse: in 1919 there was a split in the Party over whether to support the Russian Bolsheviks — Randolph and his co-editor Chandler Owen stood against the pro-Communist leftwing faction. Cruse observed that "this split among the Negro Socialists was the root cause of more destructive rivalry in Harlem's civil rights and labor politics than the records reveal."⁵ This may very well be related to the fact that W.E.B. DuBois had written relatively little about the Brotherhood. Nonetheless, it was Randolph who guided and led the porters' union to its victory when on "August 25, 1937, exactly twelve years after the union was organized, the Pullman Company signed its first contract with the brotherhood, the first signed between a union of black workers and a major American corporation."⁶ And it was mainly based upon his presidency of the union that he emerged as leading spokesman for black labor in AF of L councils, after 1937.

Those 12 years carried the bruises of courageous struggle. The first task was to fight the fear of the company's hostility towards the union. A lot of blacks were eager to be porters and were concerned about the risk of the consequences for joining the union. There were

ex-porters employed as the company's welfare workers: they were paid twice as much as the average porter, and on their visits to the porters' homes they "were quick to point out that Randolph, not being a Pullman porter and hence immune against the company's bitter hostility to unions, had nothing to lose." These workers, along with anti-union porters and company inspectors, conspired to create a constant threat to union men. Thus, "the brotherhood had to assure the porters that the membership list was carefully guarded."⁷ Nevertheless there were many who valued the necessity for collective bargaining.

Another obstacle surfaced when the brotherhood got its first drive off in Chicago. Most of the black leaders in that city were cold: they felt that the porters' chances for success were nil. Plus, their position was that the Pullman Company had greatly benefited the race by hiring blacks "and should be supported and not attacked; and that blacks should 'not bite the hand that feeds you.'" The company made sure to distribute such statements by influential Negroes to rank-and-file porters," and with the exceptions of the New York AMSTERDAM NEWS, the Chicago BEE, the Kansas City CALL and, for awhile, the Pittsburgh COURIER, the black press was pulled by the man. In the case of the St. Louis AUGUS, the Pullman Company proved to be the savior—as it became the company's direct voice to the porters. The Chicago WHIP and DEFENDER went so far as to buttress their support of the company by urging "members of the black community at large to 'align themselves with the wealthier classes in America' as their only hope of salvation."⁸

More direct action by the company became intensified as it realized that the Brotherhood was more than a fly-by-night effort. "Brotherhood stalwarts, several with decades of service as porters, were 'dishonorably' discharged; thugs hired by

the company struck down brotherhood organizers in broad daylight;" and, as mentioned above, "the black press was subsidized to launch an all-out offensive against the union."⁹

Randolph's strong position on Socialism had been consistently deteriorating and, having launched the union, he was ready to devote all his interest to the brotherhood. The situation was highly complicated: the earlier Party split, and his subsequent anti-communist attacks, resulted in another split—between Randolph and leading members of the Afrikan Blood Brotherhood who had gone into the Communist Party. On the other hand, Randolph's fierce criticisms against the Garvey Movement had antagonized a large portion of the black masses.¹⁰ This latter fact certainly aided the anti-union postures of the black newspapers, preachers, and politicians. Still, by the end of 1926, the union had successfully attracted more than half of the porters. Factions in the A F of L responded, but on the whole the racism in the union was a real barrier against full support; also, the memory that Randolph had formerly been a strong advocate of socialist revolution, added another negative dimension to the white union's racist politics. During the early period of struggle the main support of journals such as THE CRISIS, AMSTERDAM NEWS, and the NEW YORK AGE, along with the sponsoring of labor institutes and black labor conferences by the brotherhood itself, kept the union alive. "In its hour of distress, the brotherhood also had the support of the porters' wives and women relatives organized in the Colored Women's Economic Council. The council formed women's auxiliaries in various cities, which staged rallies, bazaars, picnics, boat rides, theater benefits, and other types of fund-raising socials. Of particular importance was the help the auxiliaries gave to porters' families who had suffered because of Pullman dismissals."¹¹

In the meantime, the company re-

fused to deal with the union. When the Railway Labor Act became law, the brotherhood made a move against the company at the level of the government. It failed too. At one point, there was an effort at arbitration with the company: it also was a failure, but it revealed something about Randolph. "In reaching this decision, the Pullman Company seized upon Randolph's tactical blunder in sending it a fifteen-page letter in which he assured the company that it stood to benefit immensely from recognizing the brotherhood All Randolph accomplished by the toadying tone of his letter was to convince the company that the brotherhood was weak and its demand for recognition could be ignored."¹² The situation began to worsen. It was decided that in order to force the government to act, a strike was necessary.

The threatened strike made news. The system of tips for porters was seen as substituting for the kind of wage the porters were due. But, the Railroad Mediation Board said that it could do nothing. The porters had determined to go through with the strike: "By a vote of 6,053 to 17 the strike was approved." But Randolph merely threatened to strike. "On June 8, 1928, the brotherhood's leadership called off the strike. Randolph's decision not to go forward after being empowered to do so by the membership was a serious blow to the morale of the porters."¹³

Having once been strongly critical of the A F of L's racism, now Randolph became just as conciliatory: he was ready to go into the racist pit. The union applied for an international charter. It was **accepted only because** "the porters' union did not threaten the segregated job structure or their monopoly" and its affiliation meant that "it would be kept by jurisdictional rules from encroaching on railroad jobs set aside for whites only."¹⁴ But the thought that the brotherhood would be an equal member, no matter what the advantage, could not be accepted by the inter-

nationals. The porters voted against anything less. Finally, a "compromise" was reached which recognized 13 of the largest divisions of the brotherhood as so-called federal unions of the federation. Of the criticism that followed, Randolph was "criticized most for accepting 'federal union' status when experience had proved it to be a type of unionism that completely hamstrung the efforts of black workers to improve their standards."¹⁵

The struggle continued, but the brotherhood had lost its teeth. The operation had begun as early as 1926. Cruse points to a passage in Langston Hughes' *THE BIG SEA*, where the poet referred to *THE MESSENGER* and its editor (in 1926), Wallace Thurman: "the *MESSENGER*....began by being very radical, racial, and socialistic, just after the war.... Then it later became a kind of Negro society magazine and a plugger for Negro business, with photographs of prominent colored ladies and their nice homes in it. A. Philip Randolph, now President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Chandler Owen, and George S. Schuyler were connected with it. Schuyler's editorials, a la Mencken, were the most interesting things in the magazine, verbal brickbats that said sometimes one thing, sometimes another, but always vigorously. I asked Thurman what kind of magazine the *MESSENGER* was, and he said it reflected the policy of whoever paid off best at the time."¹⁶ Schuyler, the negro conservative, was editor "until it ceased publication in the spring of 1928."¹⁷

Thus, in 1976 the porters won the favorable ruling in a lawsuit that was started in 1963 by Earl A. Love—"a retired porter who is now stricken with prostrate cancer."¹⁸ A practice that was one of the primary issues of the suit was the same old thing of assigning a porter to take charge of the duties of

the conductor, in addition to his own—still, without the chance of being promoted.

References:

Ernst Holsendolph, "Court Decides Pullman Porters Were Long Victims of Job Bias," *New York TIMES*, Feb. 23, 1976. (refs: 1, 2, 18.)

Philip S. Foner, *ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER*, (Praeger, 1974); pp. 162-3, & 177-86. (refs: 3, 4, 6-15, 17.)

Harold Cruse, *THE CRISIS OF THE NEGRO INTELLECTUAL*, (Wm. Morrow, Apollo ed. 1968); pp. 40, 43-4. (refs: 5, 16.)

(continued from p. 2)

and the wealth it creates that sustains civilization, not the platitudes of preachers or the myths of metaphysicians, once they grasp the initiative and act in accordance with their knowledge, the Capitalist Era will strain to a screeching halt and the Socialist Stage of development will spread worldwide. Then & only then will laborers, Black or White, truly reap the fruits of their labor.

—Karamoko

(continued from p. 8)

SAN RAFAEL, Ca.--Hugo Pinell, serving as his own attorney, wound up his San Quentin 6 trial defense by bringing out evidence of what he labeled "concealment" of evidence by prison authorities. Attorney Charles Garry opened the defense of Johnny Spain with expert testimony about behavior of prisoners and guards by Stanford U. prof. Phillip Zimbardo. Describing an experiment he conducted he found that pathological behavior develops in a prison situation regardless of a person's prior history. ##

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