

Parliament Upset by West Indies

By George Padmore

URIAH BUTLER, Negro strike leader in Trinidad and today one of the best known colonial fighters on behalf of the oppressed colored toilers of the British Empire, has been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Sir Murchison Fletcher, ex-Governor of Trinidad, has been sacked; or to put it more smoothly, "advised to resign," because he "negotiated" with Butler and had the courage to denounce the profiteering of the capitalist sugar and oil companies.

It was against this background that Parliament met recently to debate the Report of the Royal Commission which visited Trinidad last autumn. The debate was the most spirited to which I have ever listened on colonial matters. For, unfortunately, it is the tradition in the British Parliament to pay little or no regard to the problems of the colored peoples of the Empire, except under such circumstances which force it to do so, as in the present case. The attendance would have been much larger had it not been for the cabinet crisis caused by the resignation of Mr. Eden, which focused the attention of the House on that event to the exclusion of a problem equally as important to the well-being of the Empire.

Nevertheless, the speeches delivered last Monday were among the most brilliant that I have heard for a long time. James Maxton, chairman of the Independent Labor Party, was at his best. In my opinion, Maxton, Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Sir Stafford Cripps, Arthur Greenwood and Sir Archibald Sinclair are undoubtedly the most brilliant parliamentary speakers in the House today. Elsewhere I have already given a summarized report of the broader aspects of the debate arising out of the report. I shall here confine myself to a report of Maxton's speech in full, as I consider it the most trenchant and devastating attack delivered from the floor of the House of Commons against vested interests in the colonies and the ruthless exploitation of colored labor by white capital. While Maxton was throwing his invectives in the face of Mr. Ormsby-Gore, who sat crouched in pensive mood on the cabinet front bench, opposite the despatch box, Sir Murchison Fletcher, who sat next to me in the Visitors' Gallery was animated.

Following C. S. Taylor, Conservative member for Eastbourne, who bitterly denounced Sir Murchison Fletcher, and expressed approval of the Governor's

In this second of two articles on oppression of the workers in the British West Indies, Mr. Padmore reports on the sharp debate in Parliament following the conviction of Uriah Butler, Island leader, and the forced resignation of the Governor who conferred with him over the grievances of the people

dismissal, Mr. Maxton rose, and turning to Taylor with a pointing finger which he kept waving in a threatening manner, said, "Mr. Speaker, I have for some time been very much disturbed about the easy way in which the House of Commons tends to take its responsibilities to the millions of colored workers in the Empire. While I listened to the apologetics of the Hon. Member for Eastbourne.—"

Mr. C. S. Taylor: "Apologetics?"

Mr. Maxton: "Yes, apologetics for the horrible conditions in Trinidad which are disclosed in this report. He wants the Minister to make haste to implement the report, and the Minister has nodded his head and is going to make haste. But we have been responsible for this island for nearly a century and a half and this Commission would not have been appointed and this debate would not have taken place if there had not been an agitator called Uriah Butler, and the debate would not have assumed its present interest if there had not been a governor called Sir Murchison Fletcher.

"Butler is under sentence. Butler, who calls our attention to the troubles, is a criminal, a fanatic, suspected of not being mentally balanced. Because he says the people in the island have a standard of living which is disgraceful and discreditable, that their health is miserable, their home conditions are squalid, he is regarded as a fanatic, a madman, one to be sentenced to heavy penalties. The Governor did all the things which a Governor does in similar circumstances, except that he did one thing which governors do not usually do—he expressed a humane interest in the welfare of the people, and this is frowned upon by the Colonial Secretary.

Mussolini a Gentleman?

"The Hon. Member for Eastbourne says that the Governor talked with Butler while he was a fugitive from justice, and that was improper."

Mr. Taylor: "Negotiated with him."

Mr. Maxton: "Say 'negotiate.' Does the Hon. Member recall the important discussion in this House last week? The issue was whether we should negotiate with a criminal or wait until he had first expiated his crime. The Hon. Member for Eastbourne voted for immediate talks as the commonsense thing to do, as against the view of the late Foreign Secretary (Mr. Eden), who thought that the criminal should be kept at arms' length. (Interruption). The Hon. Member regards Uriah Butler as a criminal because Uriah Butler is an agitator; but Mussolini is a gentleman! There seems to be a curious double standard of judgment in the Hon. Member's mind. Butler *was* an agitator, but, as far as I can gather, not an unduly hasty one. He arrived in Trinidad in 1922 after serving in the army during the war. He was not rejected from the army for mental defects. There was no suggestion that he was not capable of acting as a disciplined soldier. He served in Palestine with the West Indian Regiment, and, so far as I know, he had a good record as a soldier. Afterwards he went to work in the oil fields, was injured and maimed for life. He got no penny of compensation. That is Butler's story.

"He served the Empire in the military sphere, and also industrially, and he saw that in neither of those services were he and his fellows rewarded with more than the most miserable standard of life. So he started to talk among his fellows—and when people talk about poverty and slave conditions, then they are unbalanced!

Butler Had Just Complaint

"I notice that one of my fellow countrymen, the Duke of Montrose, has taken a prominent part in this discussion. He is interested in the industrial exploitation of this island, and he is speaking out strongly against this sort of fanaticism—weak government and all the rest of it. The Colonial Secretary possibly does not know that certain people in Scotland who do not share the Duke of Montrose's political views regard him as a fanatic and agitator. He is one of the recognized spokesmen for Scottish independence.

"Had not this man Butler just grounds for agitation? He arrived in Trinidad in 1922, and the strike did not break out until 1935. That does not look like fanatical recklessness. He went

on organizing, teaching and preaching, trying for thirteen years to stir them up to demand a better standard of life."

Mr. Taylor: "Why was he expelled from the Labor Party?"

Mr. Maxton: "I was expelled from the Labor Party? Why was Mr. Eden driven out of the Cabinet?"

"Butler went on with his agitation and then a strike took place. The Hon. Member for Eastbourne says: 'Remember that in an industrial disturbance serious damage can be done to oil fields.' If I were fighting employers in certain circumstances, in the face of brutal refusal to make concessions, and under harsh repression, I should start looking round to see how I could injure them most. I have before now gone on marches with miners, in Scotland, where the mood of the marchers was very bitter and anything could have happened. I can understand the feeling of these people in Trinidad—but what is the evidence?"

"Although the opportunities were there, although the spirit must have been there, to do the maximum amount of injury, where is the evidence of serious damage done to the oil fields? There are no signs of it at all. There was a regrettable loss of life, but I notice that the numbers who lost their lives or were wounded were about nine on the side of the government forces and about eighty or ninety on the side of the civilians. Everybody will profoundly regret and condemn as atrocious the circumstances in which Corporal King was killed. Nobody would for one moment attempt to excuse or explain away a thing of that sort. It was a horrible thing.

Colored Workers Exploited

"I want to say publicly that the Governor, Sir Murchison Fletcher, showed a great humanitarian instinct in dealing with the situation. It is a shocking thing that this man's continued service under Colonial Office should have been made impossible as the result of these happenings. It was stated that he retired on grounds of ill health, but when he left Trinidad it was reported that he was coming home temporarily to advise the Government on the matters concerned. Is it an exaggeration to say that this man was dismissed from the Colonial Service for no other reason than that he went outside the ordinary duties of a Colonial Governor and showed sympathy with the common people of Trinidad in their desire for something better than the bestial conditions in which they were living? It has been said in this debate that fortunately Trinidad is the only part of the British Empire where conditions exist as described in this report. I do not believe

Insurance Head Dies



B. L. JORDAN

Booker Lawrence Jordan, one of the most highly respected Negro business men and citizen of Richmond died at his residence on North Road at 3:30 a.m., March 4, following a brief illness. The passing of Mr. Jordan takes from his race and the community one of the

that is true. I believe that conditions like these are to be found dotted over every part of the Empire wherever there are colored workers; but it is only where there is a Butler to speak out and make his voice heard and to get his countrymen to follow that the world begins to hear about it.

"It is a matter of the profoundest regret that the Colonial Secretary instead of backing the Governor, who was in difficult circumstances, threw him aside at the bidding of the oil masters, the sugar developers, and the capitalists who have invested their money in the exploitation of the colored labor. That is not his job as Colonial Secretary. He is not there to look after the vested interests of capital, but that is what he is doing. He has come down on the side of the investing community and against the great mass of the working folk in the island."

Mr. Ormsby-Gore (Colonial Secretary): "Whatever Mr. Maxton may say, if you can get this report implemented by government, by capital, and by labor, we shall have done a great thing to advance the social and economic conditions, not only in Trinidad, but throughout the West Indian Islands."

Mr. Maxton: "Thanks to Butler. Three cheers for Butler!"

most colorful pioneers in the field of business. He was secretary-manager of the Southern Aid Society of Virginia; director of the Consolidated Bank and Trust company of Richmond, and the Bankers Fire Insurance company, of Durham; one of the founders, a member of the board of directors and treasurer of the Richmond Community hospital; an active Sunday school, church and civic worker; a great humanitarian.

His life and climb like many a romance is that of the country boy who made good. He proudly claimed the honor of being a selfmade man. He was born in Louisa County. His father Robert A. Jordan was a farmer and merchant and his mother, Texana Johnson Jordan, proved to be one of the most industrious women of the community. At the age of seven, following the death of his father, the family moved to Richmond. For a while he attended the public schools, but along with the older children of the family he ultimately had to go to work. So determined was young Jordan to get somewhere in life he went to night school and studied with the younger children from their books at home.

Increasing knowledge brought a larger outlook on life and the boy determined to fit himself for a business career. He completed the secretarial and commercial course with the Business College of Buffalo, N. Y.; he later mastered law and also pursued a course in architecture, through which training he designed and superintended the construction of the majority of the Southern Aid Society's buildings.

A paragraph in his own words gives a picture of his rise in the insurance company:

"When I began as an agent, the corporation was not worth \$500.00. It had only one small rented office—Richmond. It bought fuel in 25 cent lots. On many occasions, the office force, consisting of Secretary-Manager and one clerk, had to wait for me to come in with my final report for the week before they could pay themselves their weekly salary. The corporation now owns office buildings in all of the principal cities in the State of Virginia and stores from one to three carloads of coal in the basement of each office building every summer." Its employees number 250. At this date its net assets are over \$900,000, and the gross income for the past year was over \$500,000.

He is survived by his widow, Mrs. M. Blanche Jordan; two daughters, Mrs. Daisy J. Black and Miss Marion Jordan; four brothers, William A. Jordan, Sr., Charles N. Jackson, Willie and Robert Jackson; three sisters, Mrs. Hattie E. Randolph, Mrs. Lucy Randolph and Mrs. Emma Wilson; two grandchildren and other relatives.