

American Capitalism's Attempt to Corrupt the Negro Worker.

By I. A m t e r (New York).

There is circulating about the "swell" hotels of New York a pamphlet entitled "Why Mr. George Eastman offers \$ 2,000,000". Mr. Eastman of Kodak fame has subsidized a college, just as Mr. Duke of tobacco fame has done. In late years there has been a veritable epidemic of bequests and donations to the colleges of the country — but based upon the stipulation that these "benefactors" should have the right to determine the curriculum and the staff of teachers.

There are large numbers of workers attending night schools, training schools and colleges. By obtaining a superior education, they hope to "get ahead" and not remain in the ranks of the workers. The great majority of the workers, however, are so exhausted and abused by industrial life, that there is no strength and energy left in them to undertake serious study.

The Negro problem, on the other hand, is of a somewhat different nature. Negro leaders of the last generation, like Booker T. Washington, conceived the idea that the best way for the Negro to command the respect of the white race would be to make himself more useful and efficient in practical life. An ignorant Negro was of no value: a trained mechanic, builder, nurse etc., would be infinitely more valuable to the boss, he would earn higher wages and thus help to raise himself out of the depths in which he has been held since he came as a slave to this country.

The capitalists, on the other hand, have also recognized the value of this movement. A Negro mechanically trained would be able to replace a white worker. The Negro has less wants and needs than the white worker. The Negro is not organised to any degree in trade unions. Most of the unions either have clauses in their constitutions forbidding the admittance of Negroes, or it is a "gentlemen's agreement", whereby they are kept out of the unions. Hence the capitalists and the labour leaders jointly conspire to keep the Negro in a position of subservience.

Negroes, however, can well be used as strikebreakers. Hence they must be trained not as strikebreakers directly, but as workers who, in an emergency, can easily replace the white workers. In the south, there is complete segregation of the Negro also in schools. In the North there is much reluctance at accepting Negro students. Witness the attempt at Columbia University some months ago to compel a brilliant Negro student to leave the University-tokens of the Ku Klux Klan.

Hence Booker T. Washington's plan of making the Negro useful materialized in the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute, at Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1881. Beginning very poorly, Tuskegee Institute has grown into a full-fledged college, and now must be regarded as a serious proposition: so serious, in fact that Mr. Eastman contributes \$ 2,000,000 to it.

What does the pamphlet in question say about the Negro problem? "The only hope of the Negro race and the settlement of this problem is through proper education of the Hampton-Tuskegee type, which is directed almost wholly toward making them useful citizens through education on industrial lines...

crazy this radicalism manifested itself in the miners' attempt early in July 1923 to obtain permission (refused, of course) from the U. M. W. of A. Executive Board to affiliate with the Red Labour Union International. The miners rejected the leadership of their District Lewis' and solidly accepted the leadership of such militants as Jim McLachlan, then the Secretary of the District. The Communist Party became very popular and influential in the District. It is no wonder the capitalists and the Bureaucracy became alarmed and sought for ways and means to "save Nova Scotia from — — — (no, not from capitalism) from Bolshevism".

Coercion.

This, the reactionary forces attempted first by direct coercion. In July 1923 about 4000 steel workers employed by BESCO in Sydney went out on strike for recognition of their union and better conditions. At the behest of BESCO the Government rushed in the militia. The miners demanded the withdrawal of the military and when this was refused, went out on strike. At this point, the Government, the Military, and BESCO were joined by their ally Lewis, bureaucrat head of the U. M. W. of A., who outlawed the miners strike as a "Violation of contract". The Military coerced the miners, the Government threw the strike leaders into prison on trumped-up charges of sedition, and Lewis served his masters by arbitrarily deposing the radical miners' Executive and appointing his own henchmen. The strike was mercilessly broken — but let it be remembered — not a murmur of protest from the middle classes and "uplifters". They enjoyed the spectacle as heartily as the breaking of the militant Winnipeg general strike a few years ago. In September of the same year, the Royal Commission appointed to investigate the causes of the strike reported among reasons for the strike, the low rate of wages, the long hours, the refusal of the company to recognize the steel workers union, irregular employment, unemployment and the high cost of living. The report of the Commission brought with it, of course, no improvement of conditions. On the contrary BESCO prepared to present the miners with another ten percent wage-cut at the beginning of 1925. The miners meanwhile seized their first opportunity to hold a convention to elect another Executive which was regarded as left-wing and as likely to continue the fighting policies of Jim McLachlan.

Deadlock.

Following BESCO's announcement that wages must be reduced, the Minister of Labour, the notorious Jimmy Murdock who had done so much to break the Postal Workers strike last summer, appointed a "conciliation board" under the Lemieux Act to investigate the dispute. While applying for the Board, BESCO was going right ahead with its provocative arrangements for the lookout. The miners refused to take cognizance of the Board by appointing a man, and the three eventually appointed were all former BESCO beneficiaries. The miners declared that they had no faith in fake conciliation boards under a system where, as a BESCO official brazenly admitted "The cards are all stacked against the men". A special district convention, called to consider the situation, reaffirmed the miners determination to declare a one hundred per cent strike rather than accept a cut below 1924 rates.

Capitalist Provocation.

The corporation resolved to precipitate matters by the drastic weapon of starvation. BESCO ordered its stores immediately cancel all further credits to the miners already on the brink of starvation, and to extend its lockout at the Southern collieries 2, 4, and 6. When the Corporation refused to heed the ultimatum of the Miners Executive to restore store credits and immediately provide at least four days work a week, the miners walked out solidly taking the maintenance men with them. John L. Lewis at once wired Premier Armstrong that the withdrawal of the maintenance men was contrary to the laws and policy of the U. M. W. But the miners paid no attention to him.

The Struggle.

The strike was on — a one hundred per cent strike — but from the very outset its leadership has been giving all true working-class friends of the miners, the gravest concern. The bourgeoisie adopted a method of breaking the strike in accord with

a changed situation. The directors of BESCO itself were unblushing in their frank avowals of their determination to starve the miners out. But the bourgeoisie as a whole is working more cunningly. There is the genuine fear among the middle classes of the hold and progress of the ideas of the class struggle among the miners. They have a real fear and hatred of the influence of McLachlan, of the policies of the "Maritime Labour Herald", of the prestige of the Communist Party. They remember the application for affiliation to the RILU, and they remember the militant strike of solidarity on behalf of the steel workers. The method of capitalist intervention adopted therefore in lieu of coercion, is that of throttling the strike by "kindliness". A howl suddenly goes up in the capitalist press and forums that a calamity has struck Nova Scotia. Relief must be sent immediately. The capitalist game is to represent the crisis as due to some sort of natural catastrophe, some earthquake or tidal wave or famine disaster — a pure case for philanthropy. There is never a suggestion now that this misery, whether in Nova Scotia or in Alberta, is caused by the same root conditions of capitalist exploitation as are faced by the miners of Germany or Great Britain, by the workers everywhere. Deep silence on that point. The relief campaign of the "Citizens Committee" is conducted carefully to avoid all implications of class struggle, and carefully to drug the miners into class collaboration. In this way the bourgeoisie hope to undermine the miners fighting spirit, to divert attention from the real cause of the struggle, the ruthless exploitation of BESCO, and to divert attention from the immediate need of the miners — regular employment and decent wages. A game more dangerous to the miners because more treacherous than direct military intervention.

The Game of the Bureaucracy.

As usual the trade union bureaucracy has taken its cue from the bourgeoisie. On behalf of the Trades Congress, President Tom Moore donated the paltry sum of \$ 500. towards relief. He visited the scene of hostilities — gave it the "once-over" and complacently returned to report in his "Congress Journal" that the "days of 'red' leadership of the district were over". Other than that \$ 500, nothing. This Trades Congress, affiliated with the Amsterdam International, has not even convoked an emergency conference to consider active aid to the miners.

And what of the leadership of the strike, the present miners Executive? President McLeod obtained his office by virtue of the support he received from the militants of the District, who were led to believe he was a sincere sympathizer of the left wing programme and of the policies of the former Livingston-McLachlan executive deposed by Lewis. Nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, McLeod has been abandoning the road of class struggle and has been leaning heavily on the charity and good will of the middle classes and the bureaucracy. This is a one hundred percent strike but there has not been a single mass meeting of the men called since its beginning seven weeks ago. The maintenance men have been withdrawn but there has been no picketing of the maintenance men the Corporation has maintained. But the worst action of McLeod and his associates on the executive — an action tantamount to a betrayal, and one that evoked sharp protest from the rank and file, — has been his behaviour towards the \$ 5000. that the Russian workers sent in the name of International solidarity. The McLeod Executive had allowed all relief activity to fall into the hands of the bourgeoisie "Citizens Committee" formed in Glace Bay. The Russian money was sent through Jim McLachlan and when he offered it to Citizens Committee this crew of parsons, priests, politicians, lawyers etc., flatly turned it down on the ground that its acceptance would hinder the "public" from giving. This was a bare-faced sabotage of the class interests of the workers and internationalism. It was an insult and slap in the face to the Russian workers and the RILU but neither McLeod nor any of his executive registered the angry and categorical protest that was due on behalf of the miners.

These actions of McLeod's have drawn sharp warnings from the Communist Party. The Communist Party would not do anything that could be interpreted as disrupting the ranks of the miners at the moment of struggle. But that is precisely why it has not been able to remain silent, and to abstain from warning the miners of Nova Scotia against the poison of class collaboration. Whatever the outcome of the struggle, the left wing and the Communists have been a thousand times justified in their

They have strong boards of trustees. This fact insures the wise expenditure of their money... This situation is a challenge to every public-spirited American who realises the seriousness of the Negro problem. It must be met."

There are some interesting facts in this statement. Industrial education is the solution of the Negro problem. Most of the operations that the Negro performs in industry are being replaced by machinery. The Negroes on the cotton plantation still do their work by hand because Negro labour is cheaper than machine labour. The work that the Negro is being trained for at the Tuskegee Institute is fast becoming mechanical. The Negro, however, is given such education as will fit him to take the place of the white worker — either at lower pay (because he is not protected by a trade union) or in case of strikes (when he serves the employers well as a strike-beaker). The need of such reserves has arisen by the enactment of the recent immigration law, which excludes the vast European immigration. The presence of the large Negro population in the south rendered it unnecessary to admit so much alien labour. Negro labour was used to American conditions and the very fact that it was coloured labour made it more amenable to American law and custom.

The second fact is that these institutes have "strong boards of trustees". Of this fact one can be sure. On these boards one finds such names as W. H. Taft, Francis G. Peabody, G. F. Peabody, Charles E. Bigelow, W. C. Forbes, A. B. Trowbridge, Julius Rosenwald, Paul M. Warburg, Charles A. Wickersham, J. H. Scattergood. Yes, they are "strong"-men — they know what they want and they see that they get it. There is plenty of capital behind them interested in the "proper training" of the Negro.

The "seriousness of the Negro problem" is apparent. The Negroes can and will no longer live in the south as slaves. By the hundreds of thousands they are moving to the north. If this exodus continues, the south will face a serious industrial problem — just as it did in the past few years. If they go to the north in large numbers, they will make the Negro problem in the north more acute. If they are to go to the north, they must be adapted to the needs of industry.

Hence the Tuskegee Institute is of admirable service — not to the Negro, but to the capitalist. It is no wonder, therefore, that Mr. Eastman is willing to part with \$ 2,000,000 and invites other capitalists to contribute the remaining \$ 5,000,000 required. And who should respond but such brutal exploiters as Rockefeller, E. S. Harkness and their fellows.

They are corrupting the Negro with the idea that, fitted with an education, he will be able to rise out of the misery and degradation that has been his lot for generations. They do not tell him that his efficiency will enable the employer to use cheaper black labour for white labour. They do not say that black labour will be used to break the trade unions. No, they say that the students of the Institute "go back to their homes and serve as centres of influence for better living". They do not say that the whole thing is a scheme to corrupt the Negro and make him more serviceable to the capitalist. The Negro worker is becoming disillusioned in the "friendly interest" of the capitalist. He knows that in slack times he is the first to be discharged. He knows that when feuds arise through the antagonisms that the capitalist foster, the Negro receives no protection from the law. He knows that the Negro problem of the south will soon become a Negro problem in the north, where he is segregated and restricted. He knows that he is discriminated against in the unions.

He will gradually recognise that there is but one solution to the "Negro problem", which the capitalist fears so much. Not in education on industrial lines, but **education and organisation on political lines** — not organisation on the lines of the Negro petty-bourgeoisie which joins with the white bourgeoisie in exploiting the Negro — not exorbitant rents, disorderly conditions, low pay, longer hours, with peonage on the farms and prison camps in the south; but organisation of the militant revolutionary workers and poor farmers of all colours who recognise that the problems besetting the workers and farmers cannot be settled under capitalism but only by a Workers and Farmers Government. This means a change of system; it means a revolutionary movement. It means a Communist Party to lead it. The Workers Communist Party is the only hope for the American Negro masses.