



GASTONIA AND THE NEGRO

EDITORS NOTE:—*Otto Hall worked in the Gastonia textile area as an organizer for the National Textile Workers Union. He was saved from lynching at the hands of a mob of mill owner's hangers-on by the Gastonia textile workers. This is the first time on record of white Southern workers saving a Negro from lynching.*

THE Gastonia frame-up, resulting from the determined efforts of the over-exploited mill hands of Gaston County, North Carolina, to organize, is concrete evidence of the desperation of the Textile Barons in the South. The Bourbon South, with its traditions of race inferiority, which has acted as a millstone around the necks of the great mass of workers in that section, black and white alike, seemed to Northern capitalists in search of more profits an excellent field for exploitation. This hatred which had been artificially stimulated by every method of propaganda, and which reacted to the detriment of both races, seemed a force that would forever keep the workers divided, thus facilitating the exploitation of the South. These conditions were widely advertised by the local "Babbitts" to persuade Northern manufacturers to move their industries South. They made a lot of noise about cheap docile labor, cheap waterpower, 100% Americans who unlike those "damned foreigners" up North, would never strike etc., implying that this type of worker would stand for anything and could never be organized.

But, recent events following the introduction into the mills of the vicious speed-ups and starvation wages, which is part of the modern process of industrialization,

By OTTO HALL

have shown the bosses that they have created a "Frankenstein Giant" which will eventually bring about their destruction. The Southern ruling class has always held the "poor white" classes in contempt, even considering them less useful than the Negroes. But they were shrewd enough to know that in order to keep atop of both of them, they must create and stimulate an artificial division. Every means possible is used by these Bourbons to intensify this hatred. The "poor whites" are told that if they did not look out, the Negroes would gain political control and would seize their women by force and thus destroy the purity of the great white race. The only consolation offered the white worker was not the betterment of his conditions, but the fiction that he was better than the Negro. On the other hand, the Negro carrying over a tradition from chattel slavery, was taught to look down on the "poor white" workers and to consider them as nothing but "poor trash." The slave was considered valuable property that had to be protected while the poor white was of no particular service to the ruling class. They were not interested in "free" labor as long as they could secure slave labor, which was more profitable.

But these workers could only be exploited to a certain degree which was prov-

en by the many spontaneous strikes that broke out in that district. It was under such conditions that the National Textile Workers Union entered the Southern field, and in spite of all the agitation by the manufacturers against this so-called "Red" union, controlled by "foreigners who were not even American citizens," the workers joined this union and under the leadership of this union fought against the speedup and low wages, for better living conditions. In spite of the many years of racial hatred that existed among these workers, the National Textile Workers Union was able in the heart of the Bourbon South, to bring out their program of organization of black and white workers into the same union, and actually accomplish in this vicinity, this work, which proves what has always been contended that under conditions of struggle against capitalist exploitation, workers of all nationalities and all races, no matter how intense their hatreds, can be brought together on a common basis for struggle.

The Southern white workers soon learned that all of this talk of race superiority did not mean anything to the exploited workers, that the Southern custom of segregation, Jim-Crowism, etc., did not benefit them in the slightest. The white mill workers were living in the same kind of tumble-down shacks, propped up on stilts, as the Negro workers, the only difference being in location. In spite of the fact that they were told they were superior, the mill-owned police had no hesitation in clubbing and bayonetting them even if they were members of this great superior race. They have learned that the capitalists in exploiting workers, do not consider color as a factor. This was the reason that these workers volunteered to protect the Negro organizer that was sent down to organize the Negro workers, against the terroristic threats of company thugs. The Southern ruling class realizes

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The Gastonia Gazette's idea of a member of the National Textile Union

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that once the black and white workers overcome their antagonisms and form a solid fighting organization, that it means the downfall of their power.

The work of our union in organizing black and white workers together in the South for a common fight should convince Negro workers that it is only the left wing unions with a fighting policy of class struggle that can bring about the unity of workers and thus break up racial prejudices and secure better living conditions for both. It is only thru the destruction of the capitalist system which keeps up this race prejudice can we stop lynching and all forms of discrimination. The action of the white union members in Gastonia who helped myself, the Negro organizer, escape the police who were determined to lynch him, should convince all workers that race prejudice can be destroyed thru organization. While we know that we cannot change the mind of people who have for years been propagandized on this question, overnight, and we do not say that race prejudice is altogether done away with in Gastonia, we have made a decisive step in this direction, thru our union policy, and it is up to the Negroes themselves to support all left wing unions and thru organization, which will bring about the final overthrow of the capitalist system, we will be able to effectively eliminate all racial and national antagonisms.

If as yet the workers throughout the United States are not aware of the need of solidarity, the capitalists are well aware of this and will not hesitate to break up if possible, all attempts of the workers to organize. We have the history of the Haymarket frame-up, Mooney case, Haywood, Moyer and Pettibone case, lynching of the I.W.W. organizers in Everett, Washington, the lynching of Little in Butte, Montana, the recent and countless other cases, up to the recent electrocution of Sacco and Vanzetti, to prove to us that if we are to continue our fight for the betterment of our conditions, we must build the I.L.D. which is the rear-guard of the fighting front of the workers, against capitalist oppression. We must not allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep and forget that the capitalists are ever vigilant and ready to destroy the most militant fighters of the working class. Therefore every worker must rally to the defense of these newest victims of capitalist frame-ups, the fifteen workers of Gastonia who are now in danger of electrocution.