

# The Workers (Communist) Party in the South

By WM. Z. FOSTER

The Workers (Communist) Party has made a beginning at active work in the south. This is a fact of major importance in the development of the class struggle in the United States. For this reason, among others, the present election campaign marks an epoch in the history of our Party.

The work in the south has been begun by the sending of several organizers into the field, by touring of election speakers, by the issuance of special literature, by the placing of the Party on the ballot in a number of southern states, etc.

It was my part, in this work, to address election meetings in Louisville, Birmingham, New Orleans, Atlanta, Norfolk and Richmond. The meetings in Louisville, Birmingham and New Orleans were the first communist open mass meetings ever held in the respective states of Kentucky, Alabama and Louisiana. It is fitting that with the rapid industrialization of the south and with the developing struggle of the Negroes throughout the country, the Workers (Communist) Party, the party of the working class and the champion of the oppressed Negro race, should begin its operations in the south. These activities must be greatly increased in the future.

Manifestly, the south presents many difficult problems of a major character. These must be thoroughly analyzed, programs outlined for them, and the Party organized to solve them. To these ends it is highly important that the various organizers, speakers, and active comrades, participating in the southern work, carefully compile and present their experiences to the Party. The present article is a contribution in this sense.

## A RIPE OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR PARTY

The industrialization of the south has been widely discussed in our press. There is no need for me to pile up, afresh, statistics to demonstrate this movement. But one is amazed in travelling through the south to see the extent of this new industrialization. Especially manifest is it in Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas. In dozens of towns along the way one can see new factories of many kinds, either freshly built or now in course of construction. The various towns are plastered with invitations to capitalists to establish industries locally, offering them tax exemption, low-paid and satis-

fied labor, cheap power, etc. The respective Chambers of Commerce are carrying on nationwide campaigns of publicity along these lines. At the same time, there is widespread unemployment in the various cities of the south.

The rapid industrialization of the south increasingly develops a rich field for general class activity by our Party. Wages are very low, hours long, and working conditions bad in all the southern industries, new and old. In the great Alabama coal and steel industries, wages run as low as 15 cents per hour for unskilled workers, with 25 cents per hour top rate, with the cost of living almost as high as in northern industrial centers. The 10 to 12 hour day prevails. Similar conditions exist in the textile, lumber, railroad and other industries throughout the south. The farm workers and tenant farmers, submerged in poverty, live in a semi-feudal state.

The new proletariat in the south is being developed under conditions of hardship and poverty. It is one of the basic tasks of our Party to organize this increasingly important section of the working class and to lead it in the big struggles it is bound soon to carry on against the employers and the state. Trade unionism is weaker in the south than in any other section of the country. The great armies of workers in the coal, textile, steel, lumber and agricultural industries are completely unorganized. Only the skilled upper layers of railroad workers have unions. Even the building and printing trades workers have hardly more than a skeleton organization. Unions will be built in the southern industries and the workers' standards raised only by a militant fight against the existing terrorism, industrial and political.

It is idle to expect the ultra-reactionary southern trade-union bureaucracy to lead such a fight, or that the old unions can be used as our chief organizational basis, although we must also work in these unions. To organize the unorganized masses and lead them in struggle is the task of the left wing, led by our Party and the T. U. E. L. and its organizational program must be founded upon the establishment of new industrial unions in the basic industries. The Party and the T. U. E. L. must at once orientate themselves in this direction.

The role of the left wing as the organizer and leader of the working class of the south, is further emphasized by the increasing importance of the Negro workers in southern industry which stresses our need to organize them. Our Party is the only force that can organize and lead the Negro masses in real struggle. The Republican and Democratic Parties are manifestly the enemies of the Negroes. The trade-union bureaucracy, accepting the whole Jim Crow system of the exploiters, persecutes and oppresses the Negroes by barring them from the unions, discriminating against them in

industry, and supporting their political disfranchisement and social ostracism. In Atlanta, for example, a typical situation exists. Negroes are not even allowed to come into the Labor Temple. And how little the Negroes can look to the Socialist Party for leadership is exemplified by the fact that Norman Thomas in his election tour through the south, never even mentioned the Negro question. This is in line with the general S. P. program regarding the Negroes. Only our Party speaks and fights for the Negroes and the situation in the south develops increasingly favorably for it to establish a mass following among the Negroes.

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST JIM-CROWISM

The situation in the south, in addition to offering constantly more favorable opportunities for our Party to come forward as the leader of the working class, also progressively facilitates its activities as the organizer and defender of the Negro race. The bitter injustice of the Jim Crow caste system is forced upon one at every turn in the south. This outrageous thing, ranging from studied insults to the Negro race, rank discrimination in industry, political disfranchisement and social ostracism, to lynching and other forms of open terrorism, confronts one on all sides: special railroad cars for Negroes, "colored" restaurants, waiting-rooms, libraries, schools, living districts, elevators in office buildings, etc.

The hypocritical Christians do not even allow Negroes to attend the same churches with them. In one southern park a sign says: "Dogs and Negroes not admitted." In Atlanta, regarding Grant Park, a beautiful park given to the city years ago with the provision that Negroes should be entitled to patronize it as well as whites, an agitation is now on foot to close the park altogether, seeing that it is impossible, under the terms of the gift, to legally exclude Negroes. Every effort is made throughout the south to set aside the Negroes as a super-exploited class of "untouchables."

Negro life, liberty and property have no safeguards. The killing of a Negro by a white man is a minor affair. The whole Jim Crow system is enforced at the point of the gun. Negro criminals receive sentences twice as long as whites for the same crimes. Civil suits are decided as a matter of principle in favor of whites. And all this flagrant terror and injustice is perpetuated under the false, chauvinistic slogan of "white supremacy."

It is the historic task of our Party to lead the fight against this organized persecution of the Negroes. This is a revolutionary struggle. It must be carried on under the slogans of "full social, political and industrial equality for Negroes," and "the right of self-determination for the Negroes." This is necessary not only for the liberation struggle of the Negroes, but for the general revolutionary struggle of the whole working class.

The fight around the race issues will be a hard and bitter one, especially in the south. The reactionary advocates of "white supremacy" will meet the assault of our Party on their caste system with armed force as well as legal terrorism. They will seek to crush our organization with violence. Of this we may be sure when our party gets its work well under way but our Party will be equal to the situation. Overground or underground in the south, it will successfully carry on its activities.

#### HOOVER AND SMITH IN THE SOUTH

Two basic factors now tend to facilitate our work of organizing and leading the Negroes in the south. One is the large role played by Negroes in the developing industries, which gives us a proletarian base for our Negro work in general. The other is the invasion of the "solid south" by the Republican Party, which is forcing this organization to expose its hypocritical pretenses of being the party of the Negroes. Let me speak of the latter factor.

Throughout the south one confronts widespread indications of Republican activities and sentiment. The Republican Party is making a most energetic attempt to split the solid south. Hoover buttons and automobile plates are in evidence on all sides. The Republicans will poll a large vote throughout the south, especially in Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Virginia and the Carolinas, if they do not actually carry some or all of these states.

The industrialization of the south inevitably thrusts to the fore the chief party of big capital, the Republican Party. This party is driving to establish itself in the south by mobilizing behind it the "Protestant," dry, "American" vote. Its main instrument is the Ku Klux Klan, which, if organizationally weak, has a powerful ideological following. The Klan goes forward with a tremendous "whispering" campaign against Smith to unite all the Protestant bigotry in the south against him. This is being engineered by the republican leaders despite their public, hypocritical deprecation of such methods. The trade-union leaders, mostly Klansmen, are overwhelmingly with Hoover.

Already deep inroads have been made into the democratic organization. Splits, engineered by the republicans, have taken place in many southern states. In Virginia, "Hoover Democrats" have launched the Independent Democratic Party. In Mississippi, Democratic bolters have formed the Anti-Smith Democratic Party. Similar developments are taking place all through the south. Heflin is one of the leading spokesmen of this Anti-Smith movement which is entrenching the Republican Party in the south. On a train

going through North Carolina, a party of democratic leaders, headed by Josephus Daniels, on their way to welcome Smith, occupied the same car with me and were excitedly planning how to stop all these untoward developments by "missionary work" in the districts.

To check the advance of the Republican Party, the democrats violently denounce that organization as the party of the Negroes and raise the slogan of "Vote for the Democratic Party and white supremacy." The secretary of the Democratic Party of Alabama recently declared that if the republicans break the solid south, federal troops will be used at the next election to enforce the Negro's right to vote.

Meanwhile every device of terror and duplicity is used to disfranchise the Negroes. Governor Long of Louisiana recently struck the democratic keynote in this respect when he said: "Any registrar who puts Negroes on his rolls without their coming up to the strictest requirements (which are impossible—W. Z. F.), will be removed from office and I am the man who will put them out." Violent propaganda is made on all sides that the race question is not one that can be settled by ballots but by bullets and cold steel.

But all this vigorous race prejudice propaganda fails to stop the Republican Party's progress. This is largely because that party is aggressively demonstrating that it also stands for "white supremacy." It is giving widespread assurance, by discarding its southern Negro leaders and in various other ways, that its advent to power will not disturb the Jim Crow system. It is convincing the dominant class that a vote for the Republican Party is also a vote for white supremacy and suppression of the Negro race. Thus it is compelled to throw aside its hypocritical mask as the party of the Negroes, which it has worn so unctiously for seventy years and to come out openly like the Democratic Party as a Jim Crow party.

The Workers (Communist) Party must be quick to turn to its advantage this unmasking of the Republican Party. Ever since the Civil War, the overwhelming mass of Negroes have naively supported the Republican Party as their party. But large numbers of them will be disillusioned by that party's exposure as an open supporter of Jim Crowism. We must seek to educate the Negroes generally to the true role of the Republican Party, especially in the light of the present situation, and to unite them in and around the Workers (Communist) Party as the only party that represents the interests of and fights for the Negro race.

#### NEED OF A PARTY PROGRAM FOR THE SOUTH

The Workers (Communist) Party must give active and immediate attention to the development of a special program of work in the south. The Party must establish a southern district; it must

get organizers in the field; it must carry through an aggressive campaign to recruit the Party membership and to establish in all the southern centers branches of our Party, the Y. W. C. L., and the auxiliary organizations. The weakness of the Party's activities generally in Negro work must be drastically overcome.

Together with this organizational program must be developed a political program for work in the south. We must have concrete demands for the Negroes, and for the workers as a whole based on the actual situation. We must outline definite campaigns to organize unions in the various industries. The decisive factor in all our work in the south is our policy on the Negro question. We must realize from the outset that it is the basic task of our Party to lead a militant struggle for and with the Negroes. All our activities there, all our successes and failures will turn around this central fact.

In the south we must be vigilantly on our guard to combat all tendencies in our Party to "soft-pedal" the Negro question, and to compromise with Jim Crowism. This has not been done sufficiently. We must fight resolutely against white chauvinism, because it is exactly in the south, where the fire of race prejudice is the hottest and the revolutionary initiative of the Negro most repressed, that the danger of chauvinism is the greatest in our Party and in the ranks of the workers generally. We must liquidate all such tendencies as the ignoring of the Negro question in our public speeches, failure to draw Negroes into open propaganda meetings or proposals to form separate white and Negro branches, etc. Those workers who are not willing to join a common branch with the Negroes and participate with them in Party activities are not yet ready for membership in the Workers (Communist) Party.

Especially must our Party combat and liquidate the idea of building our Party in the south primarily of whites on the theory that "if you get the white workers, you've got the Negroes." This erroneous theory is simply a crystallization of white chauvinism under a mask of left phrases. It denies the revolutionary role of the Negro. It leads to the acceptance of Jim Crowism and implies the abandonment of all struggle for and with the Negroes. It is the working theory of the socialists and the A. F. of L. fakers. It has nothing in common with a communist program. Our Party must reject and eradicate it completely. The central task of our Party in the south is to unite the Negroes directly and to lead them in the struggle. Only in this way can our Party fulfill its historic task.

The coming Party convention must give special attention to the general question of our work in the south.