

THE NEGRO AS A WORKINGMAN

BY KELLY MILLER

WHERE does the American Negro stand, and where should he stand, in the battle between capital and labor? His position is anomalous. Race prejudice violates every canon of logic, and causes its victims to do likewise. Logic aligns the Negro with labor, but good sense arrays him on the side of capital.

The Negro is essentially a manual worker. He belongs to the proletariat which works with the hands. He is therefore vitally concerned in every concession wrested from unwilling capital by the militant demands of labor. Ninety-five percent of his race are wage-earners. He is thus most keenly concerned in the advancement and maintenance of a high scale of wages. He might therefore be reasonably expected to join hands with his fellow laborers of the white race for the common advantage of their calling.

But the issue of race is deeper than the question of wages. Should labor once triumph over capital, the conflict between white and black workmen would assume an intensified form. The attitude of Australia and Canada towards the exclusion of non-white rivals but suggests the fierceness and ferocity of this issue in the United States if it is ever precipitated at close range. The Negro is as helpless as a leaf in the wind. He is wholly dependent upon the outside controlling forces by which he is directed and controlled, and so he becomes the ready victim of the issue in both its industrial and its racial aspects. In such a situation he must seek, not so much alliance, as protection from one side or the other. To which side shall he turn, to that of capital or that of labor?

Every consideration of caution and prudence impels him to seek shelter and protection from those who have rather than from those who have not. The industrial situation may be likened unto a triangle of which the Negro forms the base, with capital and white labor forming the sides. White labor presses upon the black base perpendicularly, while capital slants obliquely, and with a less perceptible pressure.

When the black man was introduced into the industrial equation it was deemed the privilege of any white man to exploit him for his economic advantage. This traditional conceit still survives. The Negro is yet regarded as an industrial tool, the surplus fruitage of whose labor should inure to the advantage of some white overlord. Just as capital feels that God ordained its prerogative to exploit labor as an agency to swell its own profit, so the white man, rich or poor, regards the Negro as the appointed instrument for his own aggrandizement. If there were no surplus productivity, capital would have no use for labor, white or black. The Negro thus becomes the victim of double exploitation. He shares the inferior estimate which capital places upon labor as subsidiary to its higher prerogative, and at the same time is the victim of the age old conceit of the divine right of the white race to exploit the lesser breeds of men.

The captain of industry feels that he can afford to be kindly and generous to the Negro laborer. He is removed by the double barrier of race and class from the plane of competition. The white workman, on the other hand, feels the keen stigma of being

forced into intimate rivalry with an inferior race. Labor differentiation always tends to the fixation of caste. Race and color are the easiest badges of distinction. It was the philosophy of the institution of slavery that the Negro should form the lowest caste, the mud-sill of society, with the entire fabric of the white world superimposed upon it. Every class stratification in the world rests ultimately upon labor. It is always pyramidal in form, with the broader layers at the lower levels.

Slavery was doomed to final overthrow by the relative number of Negroes in the total population, and the localization of the institution. If it had been spread evenly over the entire area of the United States, with a sufficient number of Negroes to do all the rougher work of society, the term of its duration would have been indefinite. In the eleven slave-holding States in 1860 only one white person out of ten was a slave-holder. The presence of the slaves was a constant reminder to the non-slave-holding whites of the menace to their racial dignity and prerogative. The two groups held each other in mutual disdain. Even down to the present day, the Negro holds the poor white man in contemptuous disesteem. The fatal blow was struck at the vitals of slavery when there arose the sharp insistence upon the political separation of free soil from slave soil. In terms of deeper meaning, this was merely the expressed determination of white labor to remove itself from the plane of competition with black labor.

II

The fact that the Negro constitutes only a fraction of the labor fund of the nation today greatly frustrates the scheme of racial and industrial adjustment. If there were Negroes enough to do all the cruder forms of work, industrial subordination would inevitably follow the color line. But such is not the case. The Negro constitutes only ten per cent of the total population, and is thus not sufficiently numerous to man any important level of industry.

The Pullman porter service is the only sharply segregated sphere of industry wherein caste and color coincide. According to the census of 1920, there were 206,290 persons in New York City engaged in domestic and personal service. The total Negro population was only 152,467. If every Negro man, woman and child had been impressed into what is usually designated as menial service, there would have been an insufficient number to meet the demand. As a matter of fact, there were 156,219 white persons and 50,081 Negroes in this branch of service. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain sharp separation between groups who must perform the same tasks at the same time and under the same rate of wages.

Negro workmen are widely scattered in thin numbers throughout the entire list of industries. Even in the South the Negro represents less than a third of the population and does only a fraction of the manual labor. The current notion that every Southern white man is an employer of Negro labor, or boss of a gang of Negro workmen, is quickly exploded when we consider the relative number of the two races.

Where the two races work side by side at the same task at the same time, the white workman must be ever on the alert to keep up the line of demarkation. The mere circumstance of color, of itself, is not enough. The juxtaposition implies social equality which wounds his sensitive pride of race. The colored workman who applies at the office for skilled employment is invariably told: "I have no objection, but all of my white workmen will quit if I give you a place among them."

In all of the leading lines of industry the white workmen organize either to shut out the Negro competitor or to shunt him aside into separate lines of work, with a lower level of dignity and a lesser rate of compensation. The bricklayer must be white, the hod-carrier may be black. The Negro may indeed bring the brick to the scaffold, but should he attempt to adjust it in its place in the wall the white brick-

layer would throw down his trowel in indignant protest. The Negro fireman may shovel coal and make steam for the engine, but must never put his hand on the throttle.

In so far as the labor unions recognize the Negro they are forced to do so by the attitude of capital. Black labor stands between the labor union and the capitalist. It would seem to be easier to handle the black competitor through the union than to have him as a menace on the outside, but the regulations of the unions, however fair they may seem on their face, always work to the disadvantage of the Negro in application. There is no practical advantage in maintaining the same level of wages at the same craft if the black man is not permitted to enter upon that craft. Capital stands for the open shop, which gives every man the unhindered right to work, according to his ability and skill, at whatever rate of wages employer and employé may agree upon. But the unions insist upon collective bargaining, which is advantageous enough for those inside the circle of benefit, but not to the Negro who loiters on the outer edge.

On the other hand, capital is impersonal. It has but one dominant motive: production, sale, and profit. The race and color of the workman count but little. The workman is listed along with the material assets as an instrument of production. A good engineer and a good engine are equally essential factors in the process of transportation. Manhood and mechanism are merged. There is no personal closeness or intimacy of contact between the employer and the employed. Race prejudice finds little room for manifestation. The capitalist, therefore, is ever disposed to be kind and generous towards black workmen. This is no less observable in the South than in the North. The Negro is as acceptable as the white man, purely as a tool of production, according to the measure of his merit and efficiency. There is also the reserved feeling that on the whole the Negro may be a little cheaper and much more obedient to command.

The political revolution in the South led by Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina grew out of the conflict between white and black labor. The Southern aristocrat of the slave-holding class, having no doubt or misgiving as to the superiority of his position, stood ready and willing to form a political alliance with the Negro on the basis of the amended Constitution. So declared Governor Wade Hampton of South Carolina and others of his class. "Not so!" shouted Tillman in strident tones. "This would put the Negro and the laboring white man on the same level, with the former aristocrats as overlords of both." Under his leadership, the reins of power were snatched from both aristocrat and Negro, while the white laboring man so manipulated the machinery of government as to keep the one on his good behavior and the other in helpless subordination.

It may be well here to recall an almost forgotten chapter of Southern political history. It covers the eighties and the early nineties. There was a serious and seemingly successful attempt to unite the poorer whites and the Negroes in a political alliance. By this fusion of the working man of both races against the aristocratic classes, Mahone won a victory in Virginia, and Pritchett and Butler in North Carolina, and Tom Watson claimed to have carried Georgia and Cobb Alabama. Both the latter were counted out by the peculiar arithmetic known to political mathematicians. Then arose Senator Tillman, the apostle of the poor white. Since then a political wedge has split the white and Negro laborer asunder.

The Negro is the weaker industrial vessel. He has not as yet the developed capacity and experience to organize and conduct enterprises affording employment to his own group under his own initiative. Developments in this direction are interesting and encouraging, but they are not yet of sufficient scope and magnitude to materially affect the industrial situation. He must look to the business world for his means of livelihood. Business stagnation spells ruin for

him. The white laboring man has nothing to give him. He, like the Negro, has only his labor to sell. The capitalist must buy from both. If, by striking hands with the white working man, the Negro should help to promote the triumph of the common cause, he has every reason to fear that he would be denied fair participation in the common fruitage of the joint victory.

III

The Northern migration of the Negro tends to increase rather than to decrease his industrial helplessness. In the South he is rapidly becoming a land owner. He owns, controls and manipulates the implements of production and gives employment, not only to members of his own family, but to additional help. The renter and the share tenant exercise a large measure of self-management. All of this is lost when he abandons the farm for industrial pursuits in the North. He becomes a hand or a helper or at best a skilled worker wholly dependent upon the corporation which employs him. What the Negro in the North gains by way of better wages and political and civic advantage, he loses in industrial independence. In an agricultural community the farm is the unit of production. An intelligent and industrious individual may hope to become owner and manager by reason of the limited investment required. In the industries large aggregations of capital, highly technical equipment, efficient organization and trained experience are demanded. The Negro can hardly hope for the present to cope with these conditions on a scale commensurate with his racial strength. He can only fit in where he is placed.

The employers of labor have been very kind to him during the past few years. The exigencies of the war created a vacuum in the labor market of the North. The black man rushed in to fill the vacancy. He came without skill or experience in the mechanical industries and without the discipline which their exactions demand. Sun-

dry faults and imperfections were overlooked. The recruits were given a fair chance. Accustomed to the loose and slovenly methods of the Southern farms, they were taught the higher standards of discipline and efficiency of Northern industry. There were, of course, some failures in the process of readjustment, but on the whole the experiment has been justified. This is due in large measure to the tolerance and patience of managements in helping the newcomers over their imperfections and handicaps. There is every indication that it is the intention of the great industries to foster and favor the Negro workmen to the fullest extent of his merit and efficiency. For the Negro wantonly to flout their generous advances by joining the restless ranks which threaten industrial ruin would be fatuous suicide.

At present the capitalistic class possesses the culture and the conscience which hold even the malignity of race passion in restraint. There is nothing in the white working class to which the Negro can appeal. They are the ones who lynch and burn and torture him. He must look to the upper element for law and order.

But the laborers outnumber the capitalists ten to one, and under democracy they must, in the long run, gain the essential aims for which they strive. White labor in the South has already snatched political power from the aristocratic overlords. Will it not also assert its dominancy in the West and in the North, and indeed in the nation? How will it fare with the Negro in that day, if now he aligns himself with capital, and refuses to help win the common battle?

Sufficient unto today is the industrial wisdom thereof! The Negro would rather think of the ills he has than fly to those he knows not of. He has a quick instinct for expediency. Now he must exercise the courage of decision. Whatever of good or evil the future may hold in store for him, today's wisdom, heedless of logical consistency, demands that he stand shoulder to shoulder with the captains of industry.

WILL CANADA EVER COME IN?

BY WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON

ANY statement about national sentiment at any particular time is valueless without a knowledge of the history of the nation in question and an understanding of the character of its people. Germany was taken by surprise when England declared war in 1914 because German statesmen had underestimated certain imponderables. Military unpreparedness, suffragette disturbances, Irish troubles and a dozen indications of domestic and imperial strife pointed to the conclusion, proved false by the event, that Britain could not fight. In much the same way the optimistic American of today reads a few snatches from Canadian newspapers, glances at the trade and population statistics, takes a squint at the map of North America, and sits back confident that in a few years Canada will be applying humbly for admission to the Union. What he is slow to understand is Canada's position in the Empire, and her real attitude toward it. Out of that position and attitude spring the nationalistic sentiments and aspirations of the Canadians, which have their roots far back in the 162 years of the country's history as British territory.

After the Seven Years' War, during which Quebec fell to Wolfe in 1759, England was by no means proud of her Canadian possessions; instead she was keen to own the little island of Guadeloupe, for sugar was just beginning to be an important commodity. France being equally anxious to retain the island—in preference to Canada—a deadlock in the peace negotiations lasted until Benjamin Franklin, who later became Canada's first postmaster-general, pointed out that, while Canada was worth-

less in itself, it might be dangerous from a military standpoint to have a foreign power situated so near the New England colonies. So Canada became British. The American Revolution got it, in 1791, representative government and extensive control of its internal affairs, but George Canning, the British foreign minister, was sure that it was only a matter of a few years until Canada would join the revolted colonies, and that therefore all attention to Canadian affairs by the British Parliament was a waste of time. This opinion was held by many Englishmen until quite recent years. When Sir John A. Macdonald and his Canadian associates went to England in 1866 to obtain ratification of their plan for federating the provinces, which included complete autonomy as to internal affairs, their business was treated as of negligible importance. Macdonald compared the progress of the bill granting Canada a national constitution to that of "a private bill uniting two or three English parishes." Sir A. T. Galt, one of the Canadian delegates, said that England was possessed of "a servile fear of the United States" and would prefer to abandon Canada rather than defend it against the latter. Among the English statesmen engaged, Bright and Gladstone were indifferent, while Sir Frederic Rogers looked on the federation as merely "a decent preparation for divorce." The point of all this is that the British connection has been maintained by the will of the Canadian people in spite of the apathy, and often gross ignorance, of the English people and their statesmen. Since the late war, Canada has become a land of promise in the minds