

Japan Fights the Boycott

By Robert Stark

IT IS within the power of American women to deal the Japanese aggressors a powerful and perhaps a decisive blow. Their weapon is the boycott. But an attempt is being made to snatch that weapon from their hands. Japan and her American confederates are trying to cripple the boycott movement, spread fantastic lies regarding its effects and impracticality—and even to enlist in their campaign workers who are entirely unaffected by the boycott of silk.

If American foreign policy has provided the anti-climax of silence and hesitation after the trumpets of Roosevelt's Chicago speech, the boycott of Japanese products is demonstrating the will of millions of Americans to halt Japanese militarism in China. The more inclusive and general the boycott becomes, the more will it serve not only as a popular implementing of the president's speech, but also as steady pressure upon the administration and Congress toward a genuine peace policy. Such a peace policy would include not only the people's "quarantine" of Japanese products, but the legal prohibition as well of all munitions and war materials to Japan—and the opening of our fullest resources to China for defense against aggression.

There lies the danger of the boycott to Japan. Halt the movement now, destroy it now, and Japan can breathe easier. Already the boycott has forced large syndicate store chains to cancel orders for Japanese goods or place them elsewhere. Bonfires have been fed with Japanese gimcracks. Both the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. have endorsed the boycott upon Japanese manufactured articles.

But the key to the success of the boycott is *silk*. Raw silk is Japan's great "money crop," its most important single article of trade. The United States uses close to 90 percent of Japan's silk export—nearly 100 million dollars a year. More than 75 percent of the silk we consume goes into hosiery. The dollar value of the silk used for hosiery is even higher than its volume indicates, because the finer and more expensive grades are required for stockings.

The success of the boycott depends, therefore, upon the effectiveness of the movement to replace silk stockings with lisle in particular and with rayon. It is here that Japan strikes. The attack comes from the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, from the Silk Exchange, the International Silk Guild. Even hosiery workers are roped in.

Behind the anti-boycott maneuvers is the Japanese government. Japan controls silk all the way from the egg which hatches the silk worm to the price of silk in New York. The completeness of this control is itself a measure of the importance which Japan attaches to silk.

Japan is working through the organizations named above, and through an "Anti-Boycott

Committee" whose members include Paolino Gerli, William H. Gosch, Emil Rieve, president of the American Association of Hosiery Workers, and S. B. Hoffman, president of the Upholsterers' International Union. Two union men and two capitalists—that's the fine hand of the publicity man.

The public relations expert is Chester M. Wright, with offices at 1003 "K" Street, Washington, D. C. Mr. Wright has numbered among his clients former President Machado (The Bloody) of Cuba, former President Calles of Mexico (who went into exile with a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*), and Luis Morones, corrupt head of the C.R.O.M., the discredited trade union federation which Toledano's C.T.M. has largely supplanted. The first job of this press agent was to stage the counter-demonstration of hosiery workers ("Wear Silk and Save Our Jobs") against the cotton and rayon fashion show in Washington, on January 28.

Who is Paolino Gerli? Mr. Gerli is the president of the International Silk Guild, vice-president of E. Gerli & Co., one of the largest importers of raw silk, and a founder of the Silk Exchange. When the Federal Trade Commission issued its recent rules on rayon identification, the accusation was made that the Silk Guild was a "Japanese propaganda agency" and that the Japanese government has "backed the move for fiber identification" in order to discredit textiles containing rayon (New York *Times*, November 13, 1937). The charge was denied by Mr. Gerli, who claimed that the Guild has "never received a dime from the Japanese government." But the fact is, as he admitted, that the \$500,000-\$750,000 fund of the Guild is raised by a contribution paid on each bale by the American importer. The arrangements for this propaganda campaign for silk were made by Mr. Gerli during one of his frequent trips to Japan. How much the Japanese government contributes to the sum raised here is not known, but in any event we do know that Japanese firms, headed by Mitsui & Co., control the import of silk into this country and are the biggest factors in the raw silk business. (Mr. Gerli is an admirer of his countryman, Benito Mussolini, and a close friend of high fascist officials.)

Let's examine Mr. William H. Gosch. He is the president of Nolde & Horst Sales Corporation—a Nazi-tinged outfit. (A subsidiary, Westminster, Ltd., continued to import German-made hosiery after Hitler's accession—and got severely burned by its losses before it would admit the potency of the anti-Nazi boycott.) Mr. Gosch is also the president of the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers. The Empire State Building, where he has his offices, also houses Mitsui & Co., and Mitsui officials have been buzzing around Gosch constantly for

months. In the past few weeks he has had several visits from a representative of the Japanese embassy in Washington. Is it any wonder then that the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, under date of January 8, 1938, wrote a letter to all manufacturers of women's hosiery, "Re: Anti-Silk Boycott," in which they said that they have been "in very close touch with the anti-silk boycott during the last three months." They fully realize their "responsibility to do every practical thing possible to protect the interests of the managements and the workers of this industry . . . the facts on our situation are of interest to the general public and we are therefore utilizing every available means for disseminating them. We have conferred with representatives of leading news services and a large number of publications with the result that the facts which we have furnished are beginning to appear before the public. Our release on the recent letter sent to Senator Norris was very widely used by the daily newspapers, and has had a good effect."

This letter enclosed a questionnaire for the purpose of ascertaining from the manufacturers how many machines they had working on lisle hosiery and in general to learn what effect the boycott has had. We shall deal further on with the information thus elicited. (Incidentally, Mr. Gosch is none too secure in his present job and the publicity he gets from the "anti-boycott" campaign may help convince his bosses that he is too valuable a man—and public figure—to lose.)

How does Emil Rieve come into this company? As international president of the American Federation of Hosiery Workers he would naturally be concerned over unemployment in the hosiery industry. Yet that unemployment is not due to the boycott. The pressure on Rieve is the necessity for negotiating new wage contracts with the unionized hosiery mills. The workers flatly rejected a recent proposal by William Leader, president of the big Philadelphia district of the union, for a 6 percent wage cut. Rieve endorsed their stand. Whereupon the manufacturers presented a set of proposals which meant a 20 to 50 percent cut—patently ridiculous. Suddenly the "Anti-Boycott Committee" is formed, with Rieve and another union man serving with two capitalists. It would appear that he has been high-pressured into going along with the manufacturers in the belief that it would help in the approaching negotiations. (In a private conversation some months ago, Rieve expressed his own sympathy for the silk boycott but feared that his own workers would not stand his open support of it.)

Yet Rieve should know that the struggles of his own union, of the C.I.O., and of all workers, are intimately bound up with the fight for

democracy. He should be aware that in this country the workers fighting against the Tom Girdlers, the Henry Fords—and the Gosches—are part of the same working class that today, in China and in Spain, is defending itself against the armies of German and Italian and Japanese Girdlers and Fords and Gosches. He should know that the workers want peace and that just as labor unions halt the aggression of the bosses, so collective action against the aggressor nations can avert the slaughter of millions. As a Socialist who has read the history of the working class, he should remember the fortitude and sacrifices of the English cotton spinners and weavers who, for three long years, suffered and hungered—yet stood like a barricade against the South's slave-grown cotton and supported the North during the Civil War.

As a matter of fact, despite Rieve's public position and the decision of the executive council of the union, there is nothing like unanimity among the rank and file. Meetings of local unions in recent months have witnessed the sharpest discussion on the basic question of the boycott, whereas a year ago, on all trade union matters, there was practical agreement. A substantial section of the rank-and-file hosiery workers see the issue as one of supporting Japanese aggression or fighting it by supporting the boycott. And this in spite of the claims, as yet insufficiently challenged, that the boycott of Japanese silk means serious unemployment. In other words, if sacrifices similar to those made by the English cotton spinners during our Civil War were required today of American hosiery workers, great numbers of them would make the sacrifices without complaining.

But the facts show, and Emil Rieve and his executive council cannot help knowing, that no such sacrifices are today required of the hosiery workers. One-third of the workers are unemployed or working part time not because of the boycott, but because of the "recession" which began before the boycott. In the expectation of further price increases, the chain and department stores, and retailers generally, bought heavily in the early spring of 1937. Then, with heavy inventories and their jacked-up prices, they faced a slump in demand. The hosiery industry felt that slump in June! Industrial production slackened, unemployment increased, relief was cut off, consumer buying-power declined—and women bought fewer silk stockings.

It is not the boycott that is causing the unemployment among hosiery workers, but lessened demand due to lessened purchasing power. The consumption figures for raw silk, just released, show that while in January 1937 the total was 44,198 bales, the figure in January 1938 was only 30,715 bales. This is a decline of 30 percent. Yet the questionnaire which the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers sent to its members revealed that of the reporting, only 1 percent of the hosiery mills have been converted to lisle and rayon production.

Now let us take up the humbug about hosiery workers being displaced by the substi-

tution of the lisle full-fashioned hosiery for silk. I emphasize lisle since rayon hosiery is not yet acceptable to most American women because it tends to stretch, does not cling to the leg, does not wear well, and is often too glossy. But the following facts hold whether it be lisle or rayon that is used.

Does lisle hosiery require different machinery than silk? The answer is no. *Exactly the same machines are used, in exactly the same way, with the same workers, the same skill, the same time, and the same wages.* If the attack on the boycott were not so vicious, some of the arguments used against lisle would be laughable. Every woman knows, for example, that most service-weight stockings have lisle tops—and practically all but the sheerest stockings have lisle-plaited feet. That is the quickest reply to anybody who insists that there is some mysterious reason why hosiery manufacturers cannot make lisle stockings. They have been doing it all the time—at least part way down the leg.

Does the conversion to lisle make many hosiery machines useless? The answer again is no. Full-fashioned hosiery is knitted on machines with a greater or smaller number of needles to each inch and a half of the needle bar. The more needles, the finer the gauge. The tension has to be adjusted, the needles changed, and the machine is ready. They do that in any hosiery mill when they change from three thread to four thread hosiery. And many a mill, when the demand came for lisles, changed over within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. I know at least one mill which did it in less time.

More than 60 percent of the full-fashioned machinery is 42-gauge or coarser. The finer gauges are 45, 48, 51, 54, and 57. The 54- and 57-gauge machines can be dismissed from our consideration, first because there are so few of them, and second because they produce \$1.50 and \$2 stockings—"cobwebby, filmy creations of sheerest luxury." Lisle stockings are today being knit on 42-, 45- and 48-gauge machines, with 42-gauge by far the most popular. On December 13, 1937, the Hoover Hosiery Mills, of Concord, N. C., announced that it was going into production on 51-gauge lisle full-fashioned stockings. A few weeks later they withdrew the line because they claimed that they could not readily obtain a suitable domestic lisle yarn. However, their original plan is evidence that this mill had no doubt about being able to run lisle on fine gauge machinery, and the present lack of a suitable yarn reveals an opportunity for the American fine-spinning industry. The extremely fine gauges, 54 and 57, represent not much more than 5 percent of the full-fashioned machinery. The standard construction, 42-gauge, is made by 60 percent of the machinery. Since the intermediate gauges, 45, 48, and 51, can also make lisles, then it is clear that close to 90 or 95 percent of American machines can be converted to lisle hosiery.

The Educational Director of the American Federation of Hosiery Workers, in a letter to the *Nation* (February 5, 1938) has stated

that lisle hosiery cannot be made on approximately 40 percent of the machinery in the industry, indicating that he believes lisles can be made only on 42-gauge machines, which are the other 60 percent. But we have seen that lisles can be run on finer gauge machines. The hosiery manufacturers have not been anxious to convert the finer gauge machines to lisles, not only because of the anti-boycott propaganda, and the, as yet, relatively limited demand, but mainly because the bitterest competition centers on the 42-gauge stockings. The manufacturers have to make the greatest concessions to big buyers on 42-gauge stockings. Naturally, when they can get their price for lisles with little competition, they will convert their 42-gauge machines to lisles. On the finer gauges the manufacturers can make more money. That is why, in the current wage discussions, the largest wage cut the manufacturers demand would apply to the workers who operate the standard 42-gauge machines. The union also has the problem of getting more of the unionized manufacturers to run lisle and rayon full-fashioned hosiery, much of which is today manufactured in non-union shops.

A relatively small group of workers, about 5000, will be affected directly by the boycott on silk. These are engaged in silk throwing, twisting, and coning. But it should be added that a new machine, just perfected, is being installed in many plants which eliminates over 50 percent of the labor in these operations.

Meanwhile the boycott has given an impetus to fine cotton spinning in America, a branch of the industry which has been dormant for many years. The Durene Association, the mercerized yarn manufacturers, has announced a new lisle yarn, and the stockings made of it have been introduced by a swanky specialty shop chain. Beating its breast, the Durene Association issues press release after release declaring that it is opposed to the boycott and that it began to work on this yarn last March. Furthermore, it urges (publicly, at any rate) that only mesh stockings be made in lisle—for sports wear and with rough fabrics in dresses. Mesh stockings cost more because they entail the use of expensive attachments and a higher labor charge. So the lisle hosiery manufacturers—and there are fifty-five mills now known to be making lisles—go blithely on, most of them, making the same stockings in lisle that they made formerly in silk. And if they stopped to think about it (which they don't), they would probably wonder what all this fuss is about—they are running their mills, at a profit.

A word as to cost. The lisle yarn is cheaper than silk. It does cost the mill money to make the necessary adjustments. But when they start running they make more profit on lisle, at present prices. The wholesale price of the cheapest silk full-fashioned stockings is today around \$4.50 a dozen (49-55c retail), while the cheapest lisle hose sell for around \$5.25 a dozen (59-69c retail.) A larger demand, call for lower prices, and more competition more mills enter the field, will bring price down.

Frederick Douglass, Forgotten Leader

By Saul Carson

BURIED in American history as effectively as if he had been a mere ephemeral sensation instead of one of the most vital factors of his time, is an American figure whose memory will not die in spite of all the tory and pseudo-liberal scholars and historians. His tradition is historical dynamite; for this reason there has been in existence for more than three decades an effective united front around the tacit agreement to let him lie buried. Next to Abraham Lincoln, he is in many ways the finest American figure in the half century between 1840 and 1890.

The giant around whose life and influence this implicit intellectual conspiracy exists is Frederick Douglass, greatest Negro leader in American history. His more militant principles, carried out logically and translated in terms of today's problems, lead to the passage and enforcement of the anti-lynching bill, to white and Negro unity in the trade unions, to common action on every front between white and Negro Americans, to fullest recognition of the Negro's equality in every respect—including the social level. Only in the last few years have these principles gained wide currency, and the credit is due to those progressive forces in American politics and trade-union activity which followed the path that Douglass blazed.

Yet James F. Rhodes's *History of the United States*, which devotes seven volumes to the period between 1850 and 1877, when the Negro problem was in the center of the American stage and Douglass in the center of the Negro problem, leaves even the very careful student with the impression that Douglass was just another of the many minor historical figures with which this exhaustive work is filled. John B. McMaster, whose nine-volume *History of the People of the United States* is considered standard in many metropolitan school systems, treats Douglass still more shabbily. His most pregnant allusion to Douglass takes the form of a casual remark about a letter from Douglass found in possession of John Brown when the latter was arrested after the Harper's Ferry putsch. McMaster does not even take the trouble to spell Douglass's name correctly. Edward Channing's six volumes have little room for mention and none for interpretation of Douglass's role; Oberholtzer admits Douglass was the Negro's leader during his long career but treats him briefly and with no sympathy; in his history, Claude Bowers recognizes Douglass's importance but, of course, looks upon him with contempt as just another of the "blacks" who tried to make things tough for the southern aristocracy during *The Tragic Years*.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS was born of a slave mother and a white father in Talbot County, in February 1817. His birthday—he was



B. Vallotton (from an 1855 daguerrotype)

Frederick A. Douglass

never certain of it—is usually celebrated on February 12, Lincoln's birthday. At the age of twenty-one he escaped from Baltimore and took refuge in New Bedford, Mass., where he lived quietly for three years. He was just another of the increasing numbers of fugitive slaves. In 1841 he appeared at an anti-slavery meeting in Nantucket, Mass., and was invited to speak of his experiences as a slave. After that speech he was made an organizer for William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist society.

Douglass died at his home in Anacostia, D. C., on February 20, 1895. During his entire public career, dating from his appearance at the Garrisonian meeting in Nantucket in August 1841, he was the most brilliant and forceful leader the Negro people ever had and in many ways the most effective. It is possible here to indicate only a few of his contributions as a hint of what the historians have so conveniently forgotten.

IT WAS Douglass who was the greatest organizer of and agitator for political abolitionism in the ten years preceding the southern slaveholders' revolt against the Union. Until he had discarded the Garrisonian swaddling clothes in the early fifties, the most popular abolitionism was moral in character—politically immoral in effect. The Garrisonians were sectarians of the rankest kind. Their slogan was "No Union with Slaveholders." They held that the United States Constitution sanctioned slavery and that there was only one way to abolish slavery: cut the North from the

South. So closely did this viewpoint approach that of the southern secessionists who arrived at the same principle of "disunion" from the other side of the fence, that the Garrisonians actually "delighted" when one state after another started seceding following the election of Lincoln.

It was Douglass who, in a twenty-one-month tour of England, Scotland, and Ireland cemented firmly British opinion in favor of the American anti-slavery movement. He renewed his agitation in England just prior to the war here, when he had to take refuge there following his indictment as a conspirator with John Brown. Garrison's disunionism had led many British abolitionists, by 1862, to the position that it would be best for Great Britain to recognize the Southern Confederacy. It was Douglass's appeal to them that brought them back into line with the opposition to such recognition.

When John Brown's Harper's Ferry adventure failed, Garrison denounced it as "a misguided, wild, and apparently insane" effort. Douglass, who had known Brown for twelve years before Harper's Ferry, and who had advocated a subsidy for Brown at the convention of the Radical Political Abolitionists in 1855, stopped long enough in his flight from arrest to write a letter to a newspaper in Rochester, explaining why he had not gone along with Brown to Harper's Ferry, but pointing out that Brown's only fault was insufficient preparation for a wide, really popular revolt of the Negro.

From 1848 to his death, Douglass was the greatest figure in the Colored People's Conventions, the prototype of today's National Negro Congress.

He not only campaigned for Lincoln while the Garrisonians sat on the fence and wrung their hands, but immediately after hostilities broke out he called for the formation of Negro militia. When Lincoln finally consented to the enlistment of Negroes, only about one hundred recruits were enrolled in the first six weeks of the campaign in 1862. Then Douglass issued his call: "Men of Color: To Arms!" Massachusetts sent two Negro regiments into the field in consequence of Douglass's call, doubling the quota that state had undertaken to supply.

As early as 1852, when Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and asked Douglass how she might best aid the Negro people, he suggested that she use her money for the establishment of an industrial college for Negroes. In the Colored People's Conventions during the following years, he continued fighting for establishment of such colleges, and he laid the basis for the industrial training movement which was later put into effect profitably by Booker T. Washington.