

## NEGRO VILLAGE OR NORTH BADIN

### OUR PERMANENT INTERESTS



WHITE friend of the Negro said last year, in a Department of Labor bulletin: "Since the great majority of Negroes are in the working class, their permanent interests are as workers." I wish I had been the author of that epigram, for I believe it will never perish. I wish even a Negro had uttered it. However, the expression belongs to everyone who accepts it. It is as much mine, since I believe it and have adopted it, as if I had uttered it.

Those who take exception to this assertion, and who would claim that "the majority of Negroes" are destined to be in some other than the working class, are postulating for a day so distant that I shall never witness it in my lifetime, and therefore I do not bother to discuss eternity. A resort to statistics will show absolutely that "the great majority of Negroes" are in the working class, and common foresight leads to the belief that a change of classification for the mass will only be accomplished through the slow evolutionary process of endless days. If this be true, then our "permanent interests" must of necessity be the interests of the working-man.

For myself, I can see that a race of twelve millions which is no richer in possessions than one white man (Mr. Rockefeller), is financially poor, and has a long, long way to go. Furthermore, I can see that only regular earning and close saving and skillful investment will make a poor race economically independent. Now, if we are mostly workers, and if we are mostly poor workers, we need jobs in order to become a wealthy people. Having agreed upon this fundamental fact, I believe we can intelligently consider the "permanent interests" of "the great majority" of Negroes.

These interests, briefly stated, in terms of primary economics, are to find and to keep good jobs, to earn and to lay aside money in order to purchase the things we need for our fullest development. They may be summed up in these words: Work, Save, Purchase!

If we need jobs, all kinds of jobs, and must have them to become a healthy, wealthy, and wise people, what kind of jobs should we prefer? It would be fair to consult former times, when I was jobless and job-hunting. My desires were normal, though my taste could not always be satisfied. The jobs I preferred were those which offered (1) good wages, and therefore an opportunity to save; (2) reasonable hours, and therefore an opportunity for leisure; (3) healthful surroundings; and (4) pleasant relations with my employer because of his personal interest in me, which led to my personal interest in him and in my work. I believe a job offering these things is the kind of a job most people would prefer to have.

While we are considering the kind of job which may be called an ideal job, let us also consider the kind of worker that may be called an ideal worker. It must be remembered that the employer owns the job, and the worker owns the labor. When a worker takes a job, the employer buys his labor, and a trade is effected, the price being the amount of money given in wages or salary. Now if our labor is for sale, we should sell it to the best advantage—just as the merchant sells his potatoes. The only way the merchant can make the selling of potatoes profitable is to sell at a good price as often as he can. If he has one hundred bushels, and sells fifty, and then closes his store, nobody would call him a reliable merchant. This same rule of business applies to the laboring man. When the market is open for his labor, he should sell it. If he can sell it for six days a week, at a good price, and only sells it for four days, his labor is not profitable, and he could not be considered a reliable worker. The laborer works for money, in order to supply his needs; and the business of selling labor, like the business of selling potatoes, is to gain a profit on the transaction, so that the seller may become financially stronger. By becoming financially stronger, the seller is enabled to save.

So, then, a man with a job is a man with earning power. A man with earning power becomes a man with purchasing power. A man with purchasing power is sought by everybody who has "goods" to sell. The "goods" may vary from a collar button to an apartment house, but the seller seeks only the man who can purchase. To become a purchaser, one must have a job. Therefore, the jobless man is never sought by anybody—except the labor agent. When one becomes a purchaser, he becomes economically free. If his purchases are valuable and substantial, they will take care of him and his family, educate his children, and give him well-earned leisure in later life. And this should be the goal of every working-man.

Anyone who reads the following pages may judge for himself whether or not a job with the Tallassee Power Company is desirable for a Negro. I need construct no arguments, nor lay out any premises, nor force any conclusions. If our "permanent interests" are in getting jobs that pay well, which are not burdensome because the hours of labor are reasonable, which are not health-destroying, and which are made pleasant because of sympathetic personal contact with our employers—then all Negro workers who are in the employ of Tallassee Power Company are on the road to economic independence. But I should not go ahead of the story. Read, and judge for yourself!