

THE NEGRO AND THE NATIONAL RECOVERY ACT

THE HEARING ON THE IRON AND STEEL CODE

By George Edmund Haynes, Ph. D.
Executive Secretary, Department of Race Relations,
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At the hearing of the National Recovery Administration on the Iron and Steel code in the auditorium of the Department of Commerce Building, Washington, D. C. last Monday, Negroes present to care for the interests of the thousands of Negro workers in this industry were conspicuous by their scarcity. Shortly after my arrival one Negro worker from one of the steel districts came in with some of his white colleagues. Mr. John P. Davis and Dr. Robert Weaver, who have been in attendance at many of the hearings and have been zealously active in presenting evidence at the Textile and Lumber codes in the interest of Negro workers, were on hand early and throughout the hearing. Rev. Robert W. Brooks attended the morning session. Although the weather was sweltering 500 to 600 whites were in attendance. In 1928 this industry employed about 420,000 workers, about one-fourth of whom were Negroes.

Steel Leaders Withdraw Employee Representation Plan

At the hearing under way, Mr. Robert P. Lamont, Secretary of the Iron and Steel Institute, with 130 firm members of the industry, including businesses that produce pig iron, iron and steel ingots, round or square iron or steel products or any of them, presented their code of fair competition. A dramatic time came when Colonel Hugh S. Johnson, Recovery Administrator, said that there had been considerable objection to Article IV, section 1, subsection 2, of the Steel code relating to employees or prospective employees joining a company union or refraining from joining any organization of their own choosing. He said in his opinion it was "inappropriate in that section of the code, which contains the mandatory provisions of the Recovery Law." After consultation with some of his colleagues, Mr. Lamont said that they had decided to withdraw the objectionable section. "It should be distinctly understood, however," he continued, "that the omission of the section does not imply any change in the attitude of the industry on the two points referred to," that their employee representation plans are desired by their employees and that they would naturally do everything in their power to preserve the satisfactory relationships now existing with their employees. Mr. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, strongly objected to this statement of Mr. Lamont and said it meant that the industry was advising the administration that it is their purpose to go back and apply that section of the code which is highly objectionable to labor as well as to industry. He proposed that the workers be permitted to vote secretly on whatever they wished in union representation.

Mr. Lamont also announced that representative from the iron plants would be present during the afternoon and make some statement with reference to the low rate for common labor of 27 cents in the Birmingham district, 25 cents in the other parts of the South, or the Southern district. These representatives later appeared and said they had agreed on a minimum rate for common labor of 30 cents per hour for both districts. This is in striking contrast to minimum rates from 35 cents to 40

cents in the other nineteen districts. Secretary Perkins speaks for Negro workers. Shortly after Mr. Lamont completed the presentation of the Steel industry code, Miss Frances Perkins, the Secretary of the United States Department of Labor, was given the floor. She made what was perhaps the most searching analysis of the code, and was loudly applauded for five minutes when she finished. She said that "the basis laid for the recovery of the Steel industry will go far toward determining the kind of industrial recovery we get for the nation as a whole. 'Steel,' she said, "is the basic fabric of our civilization. Industrial policies and the labor policies embodied in the code for that industry will spread and weave themselves into most of the important industries of the nation. And if we are to avoid a repetition of the errors that have all but wrecked our industrial structure, it is necessary that the foundation which we are now about to lay in the Steel industry shall be set in solid ground of new policies of industrial and labor management that are based on the human and economic needs of the nation as a whole."

She showed how the number of employees in the Steel industry had dropped from 420,000 in 1929 to about half that number in March 1933, and that the total earnings for the whole year 1932 were \$190,000,000, a drop of 75 per cent from 1929. She appealed to the leaders of the steel industry to take the lead in attacking the irregularity and insecurity of employment in the industry. She recited how they had concentrated on accidents in steel and iron plants and certain sections had reduced them approximately 89 per cent. She called upon them to use the same sort of skill and spirit in reducing the irregularity and insecurity of employment. She pleaded for a better adjustment of the maximum time for each worker in the industry, urging that the Steel code rule out the seven day week and the twelve-hour day. The code proposed an average of 40 hours per week within any six months' period, but Miss Perkins said that this proposal "not only permits these evils to stand in the face of thousands of unemployed who are begging for work but it will intensify irregularity of employment by stimulating unduly long hours during some months to be alternated with very little work during other months, so that the average may be kept down to 40 hours."

In discussing the minimum rate of pay Miss Perkins spoke very strong words in behalf of Negro workers. She said: "The low rates of 25 cents and 27 cents per hour for the two Southern districts are presumably based on the predominance of Negro labor in these districts. But Negroes are also consumers. Their purchasing power is needed to provide different markets for the products of agriculture and industry. It is rather that they live differently and on a lower standard. A sound national industrial system cannot be based on a capitalization of these lower living costs. A way must be found of gradually raising the living standards of the colored laborers, and in-

creased wages that will not unfairly compete with the wages of the white laborer are essential to achieving this end." John P. Davis, Chief Counsel of Negro Workers, during the afternoon session Mr. John P. Davis, of the newly formed Negro Industrial League, presented a brief in behalf of Negro steel workers which attacked mainly the differential between the wage of 25 cents and 27 cents per hour for common labor in the Southern districts compared to 35 cents and 40 cents for the other districts. He centered his attack on the claim that the cost of living in those Southern districts is lower than the cost of living in other districts. He gave a statistical comparison between the cost of food, clothing, shelter, heat and light in Jefferson County, Alabama, Birmingham district, and the Pittsburgh district in the North. He gave figures to show that meat, bread, fuel, light and other necessities cost Negro workers in Birmingham and other steel centers as much as the same necessities cost white workers in Pittsburgh and the North. Mr. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, had preceded Mr. Davis and had pleaded for higher rates with 80 cents per hour as a minimum for common labor. Mr. Davis in his presentation urged that organized labor stand for no discrimination on account of race, creed or color and that some provision be included in the code prohibiting such discrimination.

Various representatives of the workers presented facts and arguments for shorter hours and better wages. There were two or three white steel workers from Pittsburgh district and one from the Birmingham district, who spoke for their fellows at the risk of losing their jobs. There was a young white minister from Bethlehem, Pa., representing an organization of the unemployed with 500 members, who made a sane, strong plea for the unemployed of that steel center. One wondered why representatives of the fraternal and social organizations that concern themselves with the welfare of the Negro worker were not more in evidence. Some Employers Threaten to Replace Negroes. Facts brought out at the hearing and secured by consultation with officials of the Recovery Administration who have been standing up for fair play for the Negro in the forming of the Textile, Oil and Lumber codes that have already been before the administration disclose an attitude on the part of many white employers that will call for very serious concern for Negroes all over the land, especially in the South. Many of these employers where a large portion of their labor is Negro, are contending that their rates should have a lower differential on the ground of lower living costs for Negroes and that Negroes are less efficient. When representatives of the Government and of organized labor have insisted that the minimum rates of pay be the same for Negroes as for other workers, these employers have in several instances said that they will discharge Negroes and employ whites, if they have got to pay the same wage to Negroes.

Negro Workers Lack Organization. One other thought came to mind as one saw the arrangement and listened to the facts of the Steel code hearing. The Negro worker is comparatively helpless because of lack of labor organization. There are not sufficient numbers in the organizations affiliated with the American Federation of Labor in any

of the twenty churches in the denomination through which it is hoped that the New Youth Movement will be initiated. The young people of the church have entered into this New Movement with enthusiasm and increasing interest. The Young People's Council has assumed leadership in the movement and in a most vigorous way is laying the ground work for an intensive campaign during the fall and winter.

MY SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY

By Dr. Kelly Miller

My seventieth birthday has come and gone. I am made aware of the flight of time by consulting the calendar rather than by indication of physical or mental infirmities. I have filled out the Scriptural allotment of three score years and ten with every hope and expectation of extending the margin to four score and more. My father died at 97 and worked in the field the morning of the day he died. I fully anticipate another decade of active and effective service. The trustees of Howard University have granted me one year's extension before retirement after which I will be free to follow the bent of my own inclination along lines of literary work and public discussion.

My seventieth birthday was like any other summer vacation day and was spent in the usual way. I arose at six o'clock, strolled through my garden, gathered vegetables for dinner, cut a bouquet for the breakfast table, read the morning paper, and then answered the summons of the breakfast bell. After breakfast I went to the University Post Office for my morning mail, chatted some time with the professors and instructors gathered for the same purpose. I then came home, read the mail including the newspapers and magazines, then wrote for an hour or two at my typewriter. The mid-day dinner was then announced. There were timely felicitations after that a mid-day siesta, then for another hour or so in the library. Towards the cool of the evening I paddled about the garden and inspected my trees, shrubbery, grasses and flowers to see what further care they needed. There is no delight known to the sons of men comparable to the stroll in the garden early in the morning or in the cool of the evening. The only worth while vocation or avocation is cultivating the soil and cultivating the soul. I am called from the garden again by the tea bell. Now for an auto spin about the suburbs, winding up at the movies, which brings me to the end of a perfect day.

Seventy years is but a day—a watch in the night when it is passed. It might well be seized upon as a point of reflection. If it were not for the knowledge that all men must die, sooner or later, I would feel as if I might live forever. The end of the road has no terrors for me. I was sent into the world perhaps at the most dynamic period of human history. Abraham Lincoln and I were living at the same time. More progress in mastering lines and transforming discoveries have taken place in my day than had been achieved from Adam to me. I was born in the back part of a backwoods county in South Carolina amidst very crude country surroundings, and did not have a chance to observe movements and events till well in my middle teens. The electric light, the telephone, the electric car, the automobile, the linotype, the radio, and the moving picture have all come into existence since my time. Subtract from civilization what such inventions and discoveries have contributed and the subtrahend would be greater than the remainder. No less striking has been the transformation in the domain of human thinking. Darwin's "Origin of the Species" was issued just four years before I was born. It did not get under way till a quarter of a century later. Its universal acceptance has revolutionized the whole fabric of human thought and action. The basis has been shifted from heaven to earth. Before the dissemination

BOOK CHAT

By Mary White Ovington,
Treasurer of the N. A. A. C. P.

"God's Angry Man," by Leonard Ehrlich. Publishers, Simon & Schuster, Price, \$2.50, 386 Fourth Avenue, N. Y. C.

"God's Angry Man" is John Brown, that tremendous figure in American history, dismissed today by the school book historian as a misguided fanatic, but who did more to hasten the abolition of slavery in this country than any other person. The Northern soldiers swung on their way singing the single great popular anthem America has produced. "John Brown's Body Lies a Mouldering in the Grave, But His Soul Is Marching On." It marched triumphantly to the Emancipation Proclamation.

There have been a number of biographies of John Brown. Oswald Garrison Villard's is the most exhaustive, but this book of fiction, as Ehrlich describes his writing, is the greatest picture yet drawn of this Hebrew prophet, this man who could not see slavery endure and live. And it is natural that the picture should be drawn by one of the race of great prophets, by a young Jew, educated in school and college of New York. He understands the vision. I have read many of John Brown's biographers and none gives so authentic a picture as Leonard Ehrlich's, for his book is without comment, without controversy, John Brown himself.

There are two sets of people who move about this stupendous central figure, Brown's children and the men of the Negro race who followed him. His intense personality kept his sons by his side though in Kansas they hated what he did, and longed to return to their eastern homes. The Negroes also were held by this personal power. Not Frederick Douglass. Probably Brown never felt such keen disappointment as when Douglass failed to join him in the Harper's Ferry raid. "I knew you would come, Douglass, I knew you would not fail me," Brown said when they met in Virginia. But Douglass did fail him. He saw the futility of the Harper's Ferry plan. It was not what he had been led to believe it would be, the establishing of a plane to which slaves might flee, receive arms and maintain a fortress. It was an attack upon United States property and the forces of the State and the Union would be united against it. Brown could not be reasoned with and Douglass turned away from him. But his companion, Shields Green, black, escaped slave, whose child was still in thralldom in the South, said to Douglass, "I believe I go wid de ole man."

Of a different type was young Copeland, Oberlin graduate, "slender and straight as a javelin." He, too, stayed on with the ole man, and met death as Brown met it. Every one of the men with Brown in this raid knew they could never escape alive. They were as brave as Leonidas and his followers at Thermopylae. I would put Green and Copeland at the head of the list of Negro heroes. Every colored boy, and girl, too, should know of their courage and no

KNOXVILLE LETTER

By The Scriber

The Shiloh Presbyterian church conducted two church vacation schools with a total enrollment of over two hundred. The school at the main plant was under the supervision of Mrs. Sadie Draper, who was ably assisted by a corps of eight teachers. Due to the lack of playground space this school was limited to an enrollment of one hundred and fifty. The school at the outpost was conducted by Mrs. Cora Goodner and others. The enrollment of this school was over fifty. This work is located in an industrial community and is rendering a most significant service under the leadership of this consecrated woman.

During the first week in September the Shiloh church will celebrate its 68th anniversary. An elaborate program is being arranged for the occasion. Shiloh is one of the oldest churches in the city, having been organized September 4, 1865.

A Seminar on Missions will be conducted in the Shiloh church, September 11-13. This new venture on the part of the local church bids fair to be one of the outstanding features of the year. Mrs. J. S. Dalley will conduct the Seminar.

Shiloh has been selected by the Board of Christian Education

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