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The Negro Mind Reaches Out

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[385] Once upon a time in my younger years and in the dawn of this century I wrote: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” It was a pert and singing phrase which I then liked and which since I have often rehearsed to my soul and asked:—how far is this prophecy or speculation? To-day in the last years of the century’s first quarter, let us examine the matter again, especially in the memory of that great event of these great years, the World War. Fruit of the bitter rivalries of economic imperialism, the roots of that catastrophe were in Africa, deeply entwined at bottom with the problems of the color line. And of the legacy left, the problems the world inherits hold the same fatal seed; world dissension and catastrophe still lurk in the unsolved problems of race relations. What then is the world view that the consideration of this question offers?

Most men would agree that our present problem of problems was not the Color Problem, but what we call Labor, the problem of allocating work and income in the tremendous and increasingly intricate world-embracing industrial machine that our civilization has built. But despite our concern and good will, is it not possible that in its consideration our research is not directed to the vital spots geographically? Our good will is too often confined to that labor which we see and feel and exercise

around us, rather than directed to the periphery of the vast circle, where unseen and inarticulate, the determining factors are at work. And may not the continual baffling of our [386] effort and failure of our formula be due to just such mistakes? Modern imperialism and modern industrialism are one and the same system; root and branch of the same tree. The race problem is the other side of the labor problem; and the black man's burden is the white man's burden. At least it will be of absorbing interest, to step within these distant world shadows, and, looking backward, to view the European and white American labor problem from this wide perspective, remembering always that empire is the heavy hand of capital abroad.

With nearly every great European empire to-day walks its dark colonial shadow, while over all Europe there stretches the yellow shadow of Asia that lies across the world. One might indeed read the riddle of Europe by making its present plight a matter of colonial shadows, speculating on what might happen if Europe became suddenly shadowless—if Asia and Africa and the islands were cut permanently away. At any rate here is a field of inquiry, of likening and contrasting each land and its far-off shadow.

The Shadow of Portugal

I was attending the Third Pan-African Congress and I walked to the Palacio dos Cortes with Magellan. It was in December, 1923, and in Lisbon. I was rather proud. You see Magalhaes (to give him the Portuguese spelling) is a mulatto—small light-brown and his hands quick with gestures. Dr. José de Magalhaes is a busy man: a practising specialist; professor in the School of Tropical Medicine whose new buildings are rising; and above all, deputy in the Portuguese Parliament from Sao Thomé, Africa. Thus this Angolese African, educated in Lisbon and Paris, is one of the nine colored members of European Parliaments. Portugal has had colored ministers and now has three colored deputies and a senator. I saw two Portuguese in succession kissing one colored member on the floor of the house. Or was he but a dark native? There is so much ancient black blood in this peninsula.

Between the Portuguese and the African and near African there is naturally no "racial" antipathy—no accumulated historical [387] hatreds, dislikes, despisings. Not that you would likely find a black man married to a Portuguese of family and wealth, but on the other hand it seemed quite natural for Portugal to make all the blacks of her African empire citizens of Portugal with the rights of the European born.

Magalhaes and another represent Sao Thomé. They are elected by black folk independent of party. Again and again I meet black folk from Sao Thomé—young students, well-dressed, well-bred, evidently sons of well-to-do if not wealthy parents, studying in Portugal, which harbors annually a hundred such black students.

Sao Thomé illustrates some phases of European imperialism in Africa. This industrial rule involves cheap land and labor in Africa and large manufacturing capital in Europe, with a resultant opportunity for the exercise of pressure from home investors and the press. Once in a while—not often—a feud between the capitalists and the manufacturers at home throws sudden light on Africa. For instance, in the Boer War the “Cocoa Press” backed by the anti-war Liberals attacked the Unionists and exposed labor conditions in South Africa. In retaliation, after the war and when the Liberals were in power, the Unionists attacked labor conditions in the Portuguese cocoa colonies.

When I heard that an English Lieutenant-Colonel was lecturing in Lisbon, on this very island and its cocoa, I hastened to listen. As he talked, I remembered. He was soothing the Portuguese.

The Colonel was an avowed reactionary, a hater of the “Aborigines Protection Society,” Nevinson, Morel and all their ilk, and his explanations were most illuminating. It would seem that “little Englanders” backed by the Cadbury “Cocoa” press of “pacifist” leanings, made a severe attack on the Unionists during the Boer War and particularly attacked labor conditions on the Rand; besides opposing Chamberlain, “Empire preference” and protection. When the Liberals came into power in 1906 the Unionists in retaliation began to attack labor conditions in Portuguese Sao Thomé, where Cadbury and others got their cocoa and made the profits out of which [388] they supported the “Daily Mail.” The Colonel declared that labor conditions in Sao Thomé were quite ideal, whereas Nevinson and others had declared that they constituted black slavery. The point that interests us, however, is that the English cocoa manufacturers were forced by frantic efforts to justify themselves and deny all responsibility. They therefore proceeded to say that it wasn’t true and if it was, the Portuguese were responsible. Under cover of this bitter controversy an extraordinary industrial revolution took place: a boycott was placed on Portuguese cocoa the world over, and under the mists of recrimination the center of the cocoa-raising industry was transferred from Portuguese to English soil—from Sao Thomé and Principé to British Nigeria and the Gold Coast. Before 1900 less than one thousand tons of cocoa had been raised in British West Africa annually; by 1920 this had risen to one hundred and seventy thousand tons.

Of the real facts behind this rush of smoke I only know: that in the end two new groups of black folk appeared above the horizon—the black proprietors in Sao Thomé who still raise the best cocoa in the world and who, freed of the over-lordship of English capital have achieved a certain political independence in the Portuguese empire; and the black peasant proprietors of the cocoa farms of Nigeria who have performed one of the industrial miracles of a century and become the center of a world industry. In this development note if you please the characteristic of all color-line fights—the tearing across of all rational division of opinion: here is Liberalism, anti-

slavery and cocoa capitalism fighting Toryism, free Negro proprietors and economic independence. Thus with a democratic face at home, modern imperialism turns a visage of stern and unyielding autocracy toward its darker colonies. This double-faced attitude is difficult to maintain and puts hard strain on the national soul that tries it.

Thus in this part of Portuguese Africa the worst aspects of slavery melted away and colonial proprietors with smaller holdings could afford to compete with the great planters; wherefore democracy, both industrially and politically, took new life in black Portugal. Intelligent black deputies appeared in the [389] Portuguese parliaments, a hundred black students studied in the Portuguese universities and a new colonial code made black men citizens of Portugal with full rights. But in Portugal, alas! no adequate democratic control has been established, nor can be with an illiteracy of seventy-five percent; so that while the colonial code is liberally worded, and economic power has brought some freedom in Sao Thomé, unrestrained Portuguese and English capital still rules in parts of Angola and in Portuguese East Africa, where no resisting public opinion in England has yet been aroused. This shadow hangs heavily over Portugal.

The African shadows of Spain and Italy are but drafts on some imperial future not yet realized, and touch home industry and democracy only through the war budget. But Spain is pouring treasure into a future Spanish Morocco, and Italy has already poured out fabulous sums in the attempt to annex north and northeast Africa, especially Abyssinia. The prince who is to-day visiting Europe is the first adult successor of that black Menelik who humbled Italy to the dust at Adowa in 1896. Insurgent Morocco, independent Abyssinia and Liberia are, as it were, shadows of Europe on Africa unattached, and as such they curiously threaten the whole imperial program. On the one hand, they arouse democratic sympathy in homeland which makes it difficult to submerge them; and again, they are temptations to agitation for freedom and autonomy on the part of other black and subject populations. What prophet can tell what world-tempest lurks in these cloud-like shadows? Then, there is Belgium.

The Shadow of Belgium

There is a little black man in Belgium, whose name is Mfumu Paul Panda. He is filled with a certain resentment against me and American Negroes. He writes me now and then, but fairly spits his letters at me,—and they are always filled with some defense of Belgium in Africa, or rather with some accusation against England, France and Portugal there. I do not blame Panda, although I do not agree with his reasoning. [390] Unwittingly summer before last I tore his soul in two. His reason knows that I am right, but his heart denies his reason. He was nephew and therefore by African custom heir of a great chief who for thirty years, back to the time of Stanley, has co-operated with white Belgium. As a child of five, young Panda was brought home

from the Belgian Congo by a Belgian official and given to his maiden sister. This sister reared the little black boy as her own, nursed him, dressed him, schooled him and defended against the criticism of her friends his right to university training. She was his mother, his friend. He loved her and revered her. She guided and loved him. When the second Pan-African Congress came to Brussels it found Panda leader of the small black colony there and spokesman for black Belgium. He had revisited the Congo and was full of plans for reform. And he thought of the uplift of his black compatriots in terms of reform. All this the Pan-African Congress changed. First it brought on his head a storm of unmerited abuse from the industrial press: we were enemies of Belgium; we were pensioners of the Bolsheviks; we were partisans of England. Panda hotly defended us until he heard our speeches and read our resolutions.

The Pan-African Congress revealed itself to him with a new and unexplicable program. It talked of Africans as intelligent, thinking, self-directing and voting men. It envisaged an Africa for the Africans and governed by and for Africans, and it arraigned white Europe, including Belgium, for nameless and deliberate wrong in Africa. Panda was perplexed and astonished; and then his white friends and white mother rushed to the defense of Belgium and blamed him for consorting with persons with ideas so dangerous and unfair to Belgium. He turned upon us black folk in complaining wrath. He felt in a sense deceived and betrayed. He considered us foolishly radical. Belgium was not perfect, but was far less blood guilty than other European powers. Panda continues to send me clippings and facts to prove this.

In this last matter he is in a sense right. England and France and Germany deliberately laid their shadow across Africa. Belgium had Africa thrust upon her. Bismarck intended [391] the Congo Free State for Germany and he cynically made vain and foolish Leopold temporary custodian; and even after Bismarck's fall, Germany dreamed of an Africa which should include Congo, half the Portuguese territory and all the French, making Germany the great and dominant African power. For this she fought the Great War.

Meantime, and slowly, Belgium became dazzled by the dream of empire. Africa is but a small part of Britain; Africa is but a half of larger France. But the Congo is eighty-two times the size of little Belgium, and at Tervuren, wily Leopold laid a magic mirror—an intriguing flash of light, a museum set in rare beauty and approached by magnificent vistas—a flash of revealing knowledge such as no other modern land possesses of its colonial possessions. The rank and file of the Belgians were impressed. They dreamed of wealth and glory. They received the Congo from Leopold as a royal gift—shyly, but with secret pride. What nation of the world had so wonderful a colony! and Belgium started to plan its development.

Meantime the same power that exploited the Congo and made red rubber under Leopold—these same great merchants and bankers—still ruled and guided the vast territory. Moreover, Belgium, impoverished by war and conquest, needed revenue as

never before. The only difference then between the new Congo and the old was that a Belgian liberal public opinion had a right to ask questions and must be informed. Propaganda intimating that this criticism of Belgium was mainly international jealousy and that the exploitation of black Belgium would eventually lower taxes for the whites,—this was nearly enough to leave the old taskmasters and methods in control in spite of wide plans for eventual education and reform.

I remember my interview with the socialist Minister for Colonies. He hesitated to talk with me. He knew what socialism had promised the worker and what it was unable to do for the African worker, but he told me his plans for education and uplift. They were fine plans, but they remain plans even to-day, and the Belgian Congo is still a land of silence and ignorance, with few schools, with forced industry, with all the land and natural resources taken from the people and handed over to the State, and the State, so far as Congo is concerned, ruled well-nigh absolutely by profitable industry. Thus the African shadow of Belgium gravely and dangerously overshadows that little land.

The Shadow of France

I know two black men in France. One is Candace, black West Indian deputy, an out-and-out defender of the nation and more French than the French. The other is René Maran, black Goncourt prize-man and author of *Batouala* Maran's attack on France and on the black French deputy from Senegal has gone into the courts and marks an era. Never before have Negroes criticized the work of the French in Africa.

France's attitude toward black and colored folk is peculiar. England knows Negroes chiefly as colonial "natives" or as occasional curiosities on London streets. America knows Negroes mainly as freedmen and servants. But for nearly two centuries France has known educated and well-bred persons of Negro descent; they filtered in from the French West Indies, sons and relatives of French families and recognized as such under the Code Napoleon, while under English law similar folk were but nameless bastards. All the great French schools have had black students here and there; the professions have known many and the fine arts a few scattered over decades; but all this was enough to make it impossible to say in France as elsewhere that Negroes cannot be educated. That is an absurd statement to a Frenchman. It was not that the French loved or hated Negroes as such; they simply grew to regard them as men with the possibilities and shortcomings of men, added to an unusual natural personal appearance.

Then came the war and France needed black men. She recruited them by every method, by appeal, by deceit, by halfconcealed force. She threw them ruthlessly into horrible slaughter. She made them "shock" troops. They walked from the tall palms of Guinea and looked into the mouths of Krupp guns without hesitation, with

scarcely a tremor. France [393] watched them offer the blood sacrifice for their adopted motherland with splendid *sang-froid*, often with utter abandon.

But for Black Africa, Germany would have overwhelmed France before American help was in sight. A tremendous wave of sentiment toward black folk welled up in the French heart. And back of this sentiment came fear for the future, not simply fear of Germany reborn but fear of changing English interests, fear of unstable America. What Africa did for France in military protection she could easily repeat on a vaster scale; wherefore France proposes to protect herself in future from military aggression by using half a million or more of trained troops from yellow, brown and black Africa. France has 40,000,000 Frenchmen and 60,000,000 Colonials. Of these Colonials, 845,000 served in France during the war, of whom 535,000 were soldiers and 310,000 in labor contingents. Of the soldiers, 440,000 came from North and West Africa. The peace footing of the French army is now 660,000, to whom must be added 189,000 Colonial troops. With three years' service and seven years' reserve, France hopes in ten years' time to have 400,000 trained Colonial troops and 450,000 more ready to be trained. These Colonial troops will serve part of their time in France.

This program brings France face to face with the problem of democratic rule in her colonies. French industry has had wide experience in the manipulation of democracy at home, but her colonial experience is negligible. Legally, of course, the colonies are part of France. Theoretically colonials are French citizens and already the blacks of the French West Indies and the yellows and browns of North Africa are so recognized and represented in Parliament. Four towns of Senegal have similar representation; but beyond this matters hesitate.

All this brings, however, both political and economic difficulties. Diagne, black deputy from Senegal, was expelled from the Socialist party because he had made no attempt to organize a branch of the party in his district. And the whole colonial bloc stand outside the interests of home political parties, while these parties know little of the particular local demands of the colonies. As this situation develops there will come [394] the question of the practicality of ruling a world nation with one law-making body. And if devolution of power takes place what will be the relation of self-governing colonies to the mother country?

But beyond this more or less nebulous theory looms the immediately practical problem of French industry. The French nation and French private industry have invested huge sums in African colonies, considering black Africa alone. Dakar is a modern city superimposed on a native market place. Its public buildings, its vast harbor, its traffic are imposing. Conakry has miles of warehouses beneath its beautiful palms. No European country is so rapidly extending its African railways—one may ride from St. Louis over halfway to Timbuktu and from Dakar 1,500 miles to the Gulf of Guinea.

The question is, then, will France be able to make her colonies paying industrial

investments and at the same time centers for such a new birth of Negro civilization and freedom as will attach to France the mass of black folk in unswerving loyalty and will to sacrifice. Such a double possibility is to-day by no means clear. French industry is fighting to-day a terrific battle in Europe for the hegemony of reborn Central Europe. The present probabilities are that the future spread of the industrial imperialism of the West will be largely under French leadership. French and Latin imperialism in industry will depend on alliance with western Asia, northern and central Africa, with the Congo rather than the Mediterranean as the southern boundary. Suppose that this new Latin imperialism emerging from the Great War developed a new antithesis to English imperialism where blacks and browns and yellows, subdued, cajoled and governed by white men, form a laboring proletariat subject to a European white democracy which industry controls; suppose that, contrary to this, Latin Europe should evolve political control with black men and the Asiatics having a real voice in Colonial government, while both at home and in the colonies democracy in industry continued to progress; what would this cost? It would mean, of course, nothing less than the giving up of the idea of an exclusive White Man's World. It would be a revolt and a tremendous [395] revolt against the solidarity of the West in opposition to the South and East. France moving along this line would perforce carry Italy, Portugal and Spain with it, and it is the fear of such a possible idea that explains the deep-seated resentment against France on the part of England and America. It is not so much the attitude of France toward Germany that frightens white Europe, as her apparent flaunting of the white fetish. The plans of those who would build a world of white men have always assumed the ultimate acquiescence of the colored world in the face of their military power and industrial efficiency, because of the darker world's lack of unity and babel of tongues and wide cleft of religious differences. If now one part of the white world bids for dark support by gifts of at least partial manhood rights, the remainder of the white world scents treason and remains grim and unyielding in its heart. But is it certain that France is going to follow this program?

I walked through the native market at St. Louis in French Senegal—a busy, colorful scene. There was wonderful work in gold filigree and in leather, all kinds of beads and bracelets and fish and foods. Mohammedans salaamed at sunset, black- veiled Moorish women glided like somber ghosts with living eyes; mighty black men in pale burnouses strode by,—it was all curious, exotic, alluring. And yet I could not see quite the new thing that I was looking for. There was no color line particularly visible and yet there was all the raw material for it. Most of the white people were in command holding government office and getting large incomes. Most of the colored and black folk were laborers with small incomes. In the fashionable cafés you seldom saw colored folk, but you did see them now and then and no one seemed to object. There were schools, good schools, but they fell short of anything like universal education for the natives. White and colored school children ran and played together, but the great

mass of children were not in school.

As I looked more narrowly, what seemed to be happening was this: the white Frenchmen were exploiting black Africans in practically the same way as white Englishmen, but they had not yet erected or tried to erect caste lines. Consequently, into [396] the ranks of the exploiters there arose continually black men and mulattoes, but these dark men were also exploiters. They had the psychology of the exploiters. They looked upon the mass of people as means of wealth. The mass therefore had no leadership. There was no one in the colony except the unrisen and undeveloped blacks who thought of the colony as developing and being developed for its own sake and for the sake of the mass of the people there. Everyone of intelligence thought that Senegal was being developed for the sake of France and inevitably they tended to measure its development by the amount of profit.

If this sort of thing goes on will not France find herself in the same profit-taking colonial industry as England? Indeed, unless she follows English methods in African colonies can she compete with England in the amount of profit made, and if she does not make profit out of her colonies how long will her industrial masters submit without tremendous industrial returns? Or if these industrial returns come, what will be the plight of black French Africa? *Batouala* voices it. In the depths of the French Congo one finds the same exploitation of black folk as in the Belgian Congo or British West Africa. The only mitigation is that here and there in the Civil Service are black Frenchmen like René Maran who can speak out; but they seldom do.

For the most part, as I have said, in French Africa, educated Africans are Europeans. But if education goes far and develops in Africa a change in this respect must come. For this, France has a complete theoretical system of education beginning with the African village and going up to the colleges and technical schools at Goree. But at present it is, of course, only a plan and the merest skeleton of accomplishment. On the picturesque island of Goree whose ancient ramparts face modern and commercial Dakar I saw two or three hundred fine black boys of high school rank gathered in from all Senegal by competitive tests and taught thoroughly by excellent French teachers in accordance with a curriculum which, as far as it went, was equal to that of any European school; its graduates could enter the higher schools of France. A few hundred students [397] out of a black population of nineteen millions is certainly but a start. This development will call for money and trained guidance and will interfere with industry. It is not likely that the path will be followed and followed fast unless black French leaders encourage and push France, unless they see the pitfalls of American and English race leadership and bring the black apostle to devote himself to race uplift not by the compulsion of outer hate but by the lure of inner vision.

As yet I see few signs of this. I have walked in Paris with Diagne who represents Senegal—all Senegal, white and black,—in the French parliament. But Diagne is a Frenchman who is accidentally black. I suspect Diagne rather despises his own

black Wolofs. I have talked with Candace, black deputy of Guadeloupe. Candace is virulently French. He has no conception of Negro uplift, as apart from French development. One black deputy alone, Boisneuf of Martinique, has the vision. His voice rings in parliament. He made the American soldiers keep their hands off the Senegalese. He made the governor of Congo apologize and explain; he made Poincaré issue that extraordinary warning against American prejudice. Is Boisneuf an exception or a prophecy?

One looks on present France and her African shadow, then, as standing at the parting of tremendous ways; one way leads toward democracy for black as well as white—a thorny way made more difficult by the organized greed of the imperial profit-takers within and without the nation; the other road is the way of the white world, and of its contradictions and dangers, English colonies may tell.

The Shadow of England

I landed in Sierra Leone last January. The great Mountain of the Lion crouched above us, its green sides trimmed with the pretty white villas of the whites, while black town sweltered below. Despite my diplomatic status I was haled before the police and in the same room where criminals were examined I was put through the sharpest grilling I ever met in a presumably civilized land. Why? I was a black American [398] and the English fear black folk who have even tasted freedom. Everything that America has done crudely and shamelessly to suppress the Negro, England in Sierra Leone has done legally and suavely so that the Negroes themselves sometimes doubt the evidence of their own senses: segregation, disfranchisement, trial without jury, over-taxation, “Jim Crow” cars, neglect of education, economic serfdom. Yet all this can be and is technically denied. Segregation? “Oh no,” says the colonial official, “anyone can live where he will—only that beautiful and cool side of the mountain with fine roads, golf and tennis and bungalows is assigned to government officials.” Are there black officials? “Oh yes, and they can be assigned residences there, too.” But they never have been. The Negroes vote and hold office in Freetown—I met the comely black and cultured mayor—but Freetown has almost no revenues and its powers have been gradually absorbed by the autocratic white colonial government which has five million dollars a year to spend. Any government prosecutor can abolish trial by jury in any case with the consent of the judge, and all judges are white. White officials ride in special railway carriages and I am morally certain—I cannot prove it—that more is spent by the government on tennis and golf in the colony than on popular education.

These things, and powerful efforts of English industry to reap every penny of profit for England in colonial trade, leaving the black inhabitants in helpless serfdom, have aroused West Africa, and aroused it at this time because of two things—the war,

and cocoa in Nigeria. The burden of war fell hard on black and British West Africa. Their troops conquered German Africa for England and France at bitter cost and helped hold back the Turk. Yet there was not a single black officer in the British army or a single real reward save citations and new and drastic taxation even on exports.

But British West Africa had certain advantages. After the decline of the slave trade and before the discovery that slavery and serfdom in Africa could be made to pay more than the removal of the laboring forces to other parts of the world, there was a disposition to give over to the natives the black colonies [399] on the fever coast and the British Government announced the intention of gradually preparing West Africans for self-government. Missionary education and the sending of black students to England raised a small Negro intelligentsia which long struggled to place itself at the head of affairs. It had some success but lacked an economic foundation. When the new industrial imperialism swept Africa, with England in the lead, the presence of these educated black leaders was a thorn in the flesh of the new English industrialists. Their method was to crowd these leaders aside into narrower and narrower confines as we have seen in Sierre Leone. But the Negroes in the older colonies retained possession of their land and, suddenly, when the cocoa industry was transferred from Portuguese Africa, they gained in one or two colonies a new and undreamed of economic foundation. Instead of following the large plantation industry, cocoa became the product of the small individual native farm. In 1891 a native sold eighty pounds of the first cocoa raised on the Gold Coast. By 1911 this had increased to 45,000 tons and in 1916 to 72,000 tons. In Nigeria there has also been a large increase, making these colonies to-day the greatest cocoa producing countries in the world.

Moreover, this progress showed again the new democratic problems of colonization, since it began and was fostered by a certain type of white colonial official who was interested in the black man and wanted him to develop. But this official was interested in the primitive black and not in the educated black. He feared and despised the educated West African and did not believe him capable of leading his primitive brother. He sowed seeds of dissension between the two. On the other hand, the educated West African hated the white colonial leader as a supplanter and deceiver whose ultimate aims must be selfish and wrong; and as ever, between these two, the English exploiting company worked gradually its perfect will.

Determined effort was thus made by the English, both merchants and philanthropists, to cut the natives off from any union of forces or of interests with the educated West Africans. "Protectorates" under autocratic white rule were attached to [400] the colonies and the natives in the protectorates were threatened with loss of land, given almost no education and left to the mercy of a white colonial staff whose chief duty gradually came to be the encouragement of profitable industry for the great companies. These companies were represented in the governing councils,

they influenced appointments at home and especially they spread in England a carefully prepared propaganda which represented the educated “nigger” as a bumptious, unreasoning fool in a silk hat, while the untutored and unspoiled native under white control was nature’s original nobleman. Also they suggested that this “white” control must not admit too many visionaries and idealists.

This policy has not been altogether successful, for the educated Negro is appealing to English democracy and the native is beginning to seek educated black leadership. After many vicissitudes, in 1920 a Congress of West Africa was assembled on the Gold Coast, and from this a delegation was sent to London “to lay before His Majesty the King in Council through the colonial ministry certain grievances.” This was an epoch-making effort and, as was natural, the Colonial Office, where imperial industry is entrenched, refused to recognize the delegation, claiming that they did not really represent black West Africa. Nevertheless, through the League of Nations Union and the public press this delegation succeeded in putting its case before the world. They described themselves as “of that particular class of peaceful citizens who, apprehensive of the culminating danger resulting from the present political unrest in West Africa—an unrest which is silently moving throughout the length and breadth of that continent—and also appreciating the fact that the present system of administration will inevitably lead to a serious deadlock between the ‘Government and the Governed,’ decided to set themselves to the task of ameliorating this pending disaster by putting forward constitutionally a program, the carrying of which into operation will alleviate all pains and misgivings.”

The final resolutions of the Congress said, “that in the opinion of this Conference the time has arrived for a change in the Constitution of several British West African colonies, so [401] as to give the people an effective voice in their affairs both in the Legislative and Municipal Governments, and that the Conference pledges itself to submit proposals for such reforms.”

The reasons for this demand are thus described:

“In the demand for the franchise by the people of British West Africa, it is not to be supposed that they are asking to be allowed to copy a foreign institution. On the contrary, it is important to notice that the principle of electing representatives to local councils and bodies is inherent in all the systems of British West Africa. . . . From the foregoing it is obvious that a system by which the Governor of a Crown Colony nominates whom he thinks proper to represent the people is considered by them as a great anomaly and constitutes a grievance and a disability which they now request should be remedied.”

Never before has black Britain spoken so clearly or so cogently. For the most part the African population of the empire has been silent.

Since the war not only has West Africa thus spoken but the colored West Indies have complained. They want Home Rule and they are demanding it. They asked

after the war: Why was it that no black man sat in the Imperial Conference? Why is it that one of the oldest parts of the empire lingers in political serfdom to England and industrial bondage to America? Why is there not a great British West Indian Federation, stretching from Bermuda to Honduras and Guiana, and ranking with the free dominions? The answer was clear and concise—Color.

In 1916 a new agitation for representative government began in Granada. The fire spread to all the West Indies and in 1921 a delegation was received by the Colonial Office in London at the same time that the Second Pan-African Congress was in session.

Here were unusual appeals to English democracy—appeals that not even commercial propaganda could wholly hush. But there was a force that curiously counteracted them. Liberal England, wanting world peace and fearing French militarism, backed by the English thrift that is interested in the restored economic equilibrium, found as one of its most prominent [402] spokesmen Jan Smuts of South Africa, and Jan Smuts stands for the suppression of the blacks.

Jan Smuts is to-day, in his world aspects, the greatest protagonist of the white race. He is fighting to take control of Laurenço Marques from a nation that recognizes, even though it does not realize, the equality of black folk; he is fighting to keep India from political and social equality in the empire; he is fighting to insure the continued and eternal subordination of black to white in Africa; and he is fighting for peace and good will in a white Europe which can by union present a united front to the yellow, brown and black worlds. In all this he expresses bluntly, and yet not without finesse, what a powerful host of white folk believe but do not plainly say in Melbourne, New Orleans, San Francisco, Hongkong, Berlin, and London.

The words of Smuts in the recent Imperial Conference were transcribed as follows: "The tendencies in South Africa, just as elsewhere, were all democratic. If there was to be equal manhood suffrage over the Union, the whites would be swamped by the blacks. A distinction could not be made between Indians and Africans. They would be impelled by the inevitable force of logic to go the whole hog, and the result would be that not only would the whites be swamped in Natal by the Indians but the whites would be swamped all over South Africa by the blacks and the whole position for which the whites had striven for two hundred years or more now would be given up. So far as South Africa was concerned, therefore, it was a question of impossibility. For white South Africa it was not a question of dignity but a question of existence."

Back of all these attitudes is Fear. Back of the whole British Imperial Conference was fear. The worlds of color to-day are curiously and nicely balanced—a little push here, a little yielding there and the end of the vast resulting movements may be anything. The dominating thing in that Conference was the fear of the colored world.

This almost naïve setting of the darker races beyond the pale of democracy and of modern humanity was listened to with sympathetic attention in England. It is without

doubt [403] to-day the dominant policy of the British Empire. Can this policy be carried out? It involves two things—acquiescence of the darker peoples and agreement between capital and labor in white democracies.

This agreement between capital and labor in regard to colored folk cannot be depended on. First of all, no sooner is colored labor duly subordinate, voiceless in government, efficient for the purpose and cheap, than the division of the resultant profit is a matter of dispute. This is the case even in South Africa and it came as a singular answer to Smuts. In South Africa white labor is highly paid, can vote, and by a system of black helpers occupies an easy and powerful position. It can only retain this position by vigorously excluding blacks from certain occupations and by beating their wages down to the lowest point even when as helpers they are really doing the prohibited work. It is to the manifest interest of capitalists and investors to breach if not overthrow this caste wall and thus secure higher profits by cheaper and more pliable labor. Already South African courts are slowly moving toward mitigating the law of labor caste and in retaliation the white labor unions have joined Smuts' political enemies, the English-hating Boer party of independence, and have overthrown the great premier.

But how curious are these bedfellows—English capital and African black labor against Dutch home-rulers and the trades unions. The combinations are as illogical as they are thought-producing, for after all if South Africa is really bent on independence she must make economic and political peace with the blacks; and if she hates Negroes more than she hates low wages she must submit even more than now to English rule.

Now what is English rule over colored folk destined to be? Here comes the second puzzling result of the Smuts philosophy. I was in London on the night of the Guild Hall banquet when the Prime Minister spoke on "Empire Policy and World Peace" and gave a sort of summing up of the work of the Imperial Conference. It was significant that in the forefront of his words, cheek by jowl with Imperial "foreign policy," stood the "intensity of feeling in India on the question of the [404] status of British Indians in the Empire." What indeed could be more fundamental than this in the building of world peace? Are the brown Indians to share equally in the ruling of the British Empire or are they an inferior race? And curiously enough, the battle on this point is impending not simply in the unchecked movement toward "swaraj" in India but in Africa—in the Union of South Africa and in Kenya.

In South Africa, despite all Imperial explanations and attempts to smooth things out, Smuts and the Boers have taken firm ground: Indians are to be classed with Negroes in their social and political exclusion. South Africa is to be ruled by its minority of whites. But if this is blunt and unswerving, how much more startling is Kenya. Kenya is the British East Africa of pre-war days and extends from the Indian Ocean to the Victoria Nyanza and from German East Africa to Ethiopia. It is that great roof of the African world where, beneath the silver heads of the Mountains of

the Moon, came down in ancient days those waters and races which founded Egypt. The descendant races still live there with fine physique and noble heads—the Masai warriors whom Schweinfurth heralded, the Dinka, the Galla, and Nile Negroes—the herdsmen and primitive artisans of the beautiful highlands. Here was a land largely untainted by the fevers of the tropics and here England proposed to send her sick and impoverished soldiers of the war. Following the lead of South Africa, she took over five million acres of the best lands from the 3,000,000 natives, herded them gradually toward the swamps and gave them, even there, no sure title; then by taxation she forced sixty per cent of the black adults into working for the ten thousand white owners for the lowest wage. Here was opportunity not simply for the great landholder and slave-driver but also for the small trader, and twenty-four thousand Indians came. These Indians claimed the rights of free subjects of the empire—a right to buy land, a right to exploit labor, a right to a voice in the government now confined to the handful of whites.

Suddenly a great race conflict swept East Africa—orient and occident, white, brown and black, landlord, trader and landless [405] serf. When the Indians asked rights, the whites replied that this would injure the rights of the natives. Immediately the natives began to awake. Few of them were educated but they began to form societies and formulate grievances. A black political consciousness arose for the first time in Kenya. Immediately the Indians made a bid for the support of this new force and asked rights and privileges for all British subjects—white, brown and black. As the Indian pressed his case, white South Africa rose in alarm. If the Indian became a recognized man, landholder and voter in Kenya, what of Natal?

The British Government speculated and procrastinated and then announced its decision: East Africa was primarily a “trusteeship” for the Africans and not for the Indians. The Indians, then, must be satisfied with limited industrial and political rights, while for the black native—the white Englishman spoke! A conservative Indian leader, speaking in England after this decision, said that if the Indian problem in South Africa were allowed to fester much longer it would pass beyond the bounds of domestic issue and would become a question of foreign policy upon which the unity of the Empire might founder irretrievably. The Empire could never keep its colored races within it by force, he said, but only by preserving and safeguarding their sentiments.

Perhaps this shrewd Kenya decision was too shrewd. It preserved white control of Kenya but it said in effect: “Africa for the Africans!” What then about Uganda and the Sudan, where a black leadership exists under ancient forms; and, above all, what about the educated black leadership in the West Indies and West Africa? Why should black West Africa with its industrial triumphs like Nigeria be content forever with a Crown Government, if Africa is for the Africans?

The result has been a yielding by England to the darker world—not a yielding of much, but yielding. India is to have a revision of the impossible “diarchy”; all

West Africa is to have a small elective element in its governing councils; and even the far West Indies have been visited by a colonial undersecretary and parliamentary committee, the first of its kind in [406] the long history of the islands. Their report is worth quoting in part: "Several reasons combine to make it likely that the common demand for a measure of representative government will in the long run prove irresistible. The wave of democratic sentiment has been powerfully stimulated by the war. Education is rapidly spreading and tending to produce a colored and black intelligentsia of which the members are quick to absorb elements of knowledge requisite for entry into learned professions and return from travel abroad with minds emancipated and enlarged, ready to devote time and energy to propaganda among their own people."

Egypt too is Africa and the Bilad-es-Sudan, Land of the Blacks, has in its eastern reaches belonged to Egypt ever since Egypt belonged to the Sudan—ever since the Pharaohs bowed to the Lords of Meroe. Fifty times England has promised freedom and independence to Egypt and to-day she keeps her word by seizing the Sudan with a million square miles, six million black folk and twenty million dollars of annual revenue. But Egypt without the Sudan can never be free and independent and this England well knows, but she will hold the Sudan against Egypt as "trustee" for the blacks. That was a fateful step that the new Conservatives took after the Sirdar was murdered by hot revolutionists. Its echo will long haunt the world.

If now England is literally forced to yield some measure of self-government to her darker colonies; if France remains steadfast in the way in which her feet seem to be tending; if Asia arises from the dead and can no longer be rendered impotent by the opium of international finance, what will happen to imperialistic world industry as exemplified in the great expansion of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

Labor in the Shadows

This is the question that faces the new labor parties of the world—the new political organizations which are determined to force a larger measure of democracy in industry than now obtains. The trade union labor movement dominant in Australia, South Africa and the United States has been hitherto [407] autocratic and at heart capitalistic, believing in profit-making industry and wishing only to secure a larger share of profits for particular guilds. But the larger labor movement following the war envisages through democratic political action real democratic power of the mass of workers in industry and commerce. Two questions here arise: Will the new labor parties welcome the darker race to this industrial democracy? And, if they do, how will this affect industry?

The attitude of the white laborer toward colored folk is largely a matter of long continued propaganda and gossip. The white laborers can read and write, but beyond

this their education and experience are limited and they live in a world of color prejudice. The curious, most childish propaganda dominates us, by which good, earnest, even intelligent men have come by millions to believe almost religiously that white folk are a peculiar and chosen people whose one great accomplishment is civilization and that civilization must be protected from the rest of the world by cheating, stealing, lying, and murder. The propaganda, the terrible, ceaseless propaganda that buttresses this belief day by day—the propaganda of poet and novelist, the uncanny welter of romance, the half knowledge of scientists, the pseudo-science of statesmen—all these, united in the myth of mass inferiority of most men, have built a wall which many centuries will not break down. Born into such a spiritual world, the average white worker is absolutely at the mercy of its beliefs and prejudices. Color hate easily assumes the form of a religion and the laborer becomes the blind executive of the decrees of the masters of the white world; he votes armies and navies for “punitive” expeditions; he sends his sons as soldiers and sailors; he composes the Negro-hating mob, demands Japanese exclusion and lynches untried prisoners. What hope is there that such a mass of dimly thinking and misled men will ever demand universal democracy for all men?

The chief hope lies in the gradual but inevitable spread of the knowledge that the denial of democracy in Asia and Africa hinders its complete realization in Europe. It is this that makes the Color Problem and the Labor Problem to so[408] great an extent two sides of the same human tangle. How far does white labor see this? Not far, as yet. Its attitude toward colored labor varies from the Russian extreme to the extreme in South Africa and Australia. Russia has been seeking a *rapprochement* with colored labor. She is making her peace with China and Japan. Her leaders have come in close touch with the leaders of India. Claude McKay, an American Negro poet travelling in Russia, declares: “Lenin himself grappled with the question of the American Negroes and spoke on the subject before the Second Congress of the Third International. He consulted with John Reed, the American journalist, and dwelt on the urgent necessity of propaganda and organization work among the Negroes of the South.”

Between these extremes waver the white workers of the rest of the world. On the whole they still lean rather toward the attitude of South Africa than that of Russia. They exclude colored labor from empty Australia. They sit in armed truce against them in America where the Negroes are forcing their way into ranks of union labor by breaking strikes and underbidding them in wage.

It is precisely by these tactics, however, and by hindering the natural flow of labor toward the highest wage and the best conditions in the world that white labor is segregating colored labor in just those parts of the world where it can be most easily exploited by white capital and thus giving white capital the power to rule all labor, white and black, in the rest of the world. White labor is beginning dimly to see this. Colored labor knows it, and as colored labor becomes more organized and more

intelligent it is going to spread this grievance through the white world.

The Shadow of Shadows

How much intelligent organization is there for this purpose on the part of the colored world? So far there is very little. For while the colored people of to-day are common victims of white culture, there is a vast gulf between the red-black South and the yellow-brown East. In the East long since, centuries [409] ago, there were mastered a technique and philosophy which still stand among the greatest the world has known; and the black and African South, beginning in the dim dawn of time when beginnings were everything, have evolved a physique and an art, a will to be and to enjoy, which the world has never done without and never can. But these cultures have little in common, either to-day or yesterday, and are being pounded together artificially and not attracting each other naturally. And yet quickened India, the South and West African Congresses, the Pan-African movement, the National Association for the advancement of Colored People in America, together with rising China and risen Japan—all these at no distant day may come to common consciousness of aim and be able to give to the labor parties of the world a message that they will understand.

After all, the darker world realizes the industrial triumphs of white Europe—its labor-saving devices, its harnessing of vast radical forces, its conquest of time and space by goods- production, railway, telephone, telegraph and flying machine, it sees how the world might enjoy these things and how it does not, how it is enslaved by its own ingenuity, mechanized by its own machinery. It sees Western civilization spiritually bankrupt and unhappy.

Africa is happy. The masses of its black folk are calmly contented, save where what is called “European” civilization has touched and uprooted them. They have a philosophy of life logical and realizable. Their children are carefully educated for the life they are to lead. There are no prostitutes, there is no poverty. In Asia too (although here I speak by hearsay, knowing Asiatics but not Asia) there is, over vast spiritual areas, peace and self-realization; a certain completeness of individual life; a worship of beauty even among the masses; adequate handling of matter for certain personal ends and satisfactions, and a religious spirit which is neither hypocritical nor unbelieving. On the other hand *Africa* and Asia have no command of technique or mastery of physical force that can compare with that of the West; they know practically nothing of mass-time production and their knowledge [410] of the facts of the universe is far behind modern knowledge.

That comfort is necessary to complete human happiness, who can for a moment doubt? But what shall the world pay for this completeness—what is it paying now? First of all, it has in the heyday of its triumph been able or willing to supply comfort but to a minority of its own population. The majority of the whole people of Europe have

poor food, inadequate clothing, bad shelter, inadequate amusement and misleading education. They are more comfortable than the African savages only in their water supply, their foods and their opportunity to look at brilliantly lighted streets.

To save then this efficient organization of work, this synchronization of human industrial effort the like of which the world never before saw—to save this, and led by the idea that at all hazards it must be saved, white Western Europe has long been united in a determination to make the colored worlds contribute to its comfort, subordinate themselves to its interests, become part of its machine. It argues that on this path alone lies salvation for the lazy South and the sleepy East; that upon them lies the salvation of the world ; and they ignore with perfect ignorance the possibility that lazy enjoyment and silent contemplation of life, without a surplus or even a sufficiency of modern comfort may for a moment be held an end and ideal of existence; or that the efficient West and North can learn of the lazy South and sleepy East.

If now the world, and particularly the laboring world, should come to realize that industrial efficiency as measured by the amount of goods made and the size of the private profit derived therefrom is not the greatest thing in the world; and that by exchanging European efficiency for African leisure and Asiatic contemplation they might gain tremendously in happiness, the world might be less afraid to give up economic imperialism. Moreover, future economic imperialism can only be held together by militarism. Militarism is costly and to increasing masses of men since the Great War, hateful; more than this—the darker world is held in subjection to Europe by its own darker soldiers. Africa is owned and held almost entirely by Europe; but at the same time Africa is held and kept in[411] subjection to Europe by black troops; black troops in the Sudan, black troops in French Africa, black troops in British West Africa, black troops in Belgian Congo, black troops in Italian Africa, black troops in Kenya, in Uganda, and in former German Africa. Mutual jealousies, widespread ignorance, tribal hatreds and red uniforms make this to-day a most effective method of military control. But for how many years can this be depended upon? Indian soldiers hold India in subjection to England and France. They cannot always be expected to do this. Some day they are bound to awake.

Above all this rises the shadow of two international groups—the Jews and the modern Negroes. The Jews are, in blood, Spanish, German, French, Arabian and American. Their ancient unity of religious faith is crumbling, but out of it all has come a spiritual unity born of suffering, prejudice and industrial power which can be used and is being used to spread an international consciousness. Where this spirit encounters a rampant new nationalism as in Poland or bitter memories of national loss as in Germany, or racial bigotry as in America, it stirs an Anti-Semitism as cruel as it is indefinite and armed in fact not against an abused race but against any spirit that works or seems to work for the union of human kind.

And toward this same great end a new group of groups is setting its face. Pan-

Africanism as a living movement, a tangible accomplishment, is a little and negligible thing. But there are twenty-three millions of Negroes in British West Africa, eighteen millions in French Africa, eleven millions and more in the United States; between eight and nine millions each in the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Africa; and a dozen other lands in Africa and America have groups ranging from two to five millions. This hundred and fifty millions of people are gaining slowly an intelligent thoughtful leadership. The main seat of their leadership is to-day the United States.

In the United States there are certain unheralded indications of development in the Negro problem. One is the fact that for the first time in America, the American Negro is to-day universally recognized as capable of speaking for himself. To realize the significance of this one has but to remember that[412] less than twenty-five years ago a conference of friends of the Negro could meet at Lake Mohonk to discuss his problems without a single Negro present. And even later than that, great magazines could publish symposiums on the "Negro" problem without thinking of inviting a single Negro to participate. Again, a revolution is happening under our eyes with regard to lynching. For forty years, not less than a Negro a week and sometimes as many as five a week have been lynched in order to enforce race inferiority by terrorism. Suddenly this number in 1923 was cut in half and it looks as though the record of 1924 was going to be not more than one Negro lynched each month and all this was due primarily to the tremendous onslaught of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People against lynching and their broad-casting of the facts.

Finally and just as important is the new national policy as to immigration, born of war. This policy is seemingly a tremendous triumph of the "Nordics" and not only cuts down the foreign immigration to the United States from 1,000,000 a year to 160,000, but also seeks to exclude the Latins and Jews and openly to insult Asiatics. Now despite the inhumanity of this, American Negroes are silently elated at this policy. As long as the northern lords of industry could import cheap, white labor from Europe they could encourage the color line in industry and leave the Negroes as peons and serfs at the mercy of the white South. But to-day with the cutting down of foreign immigration the Negro becomes the best source of cheap labor for the industries of the white land. The bidding for his services gives him a tremendous sword to wield against the Bourbon South and by means of wholesale migration he is wielding it. But note again the extraordinary bed fellows involved in this paradox; Negro laborers, white capitalists and "Nordic" fanatics against Latin Europe, Southern task masters, labor unions, the Jews and Japanese!

Led by American Negroes, the Negroes of the world are reaching out hands toward each other to know, to sympathize, to inquire. There are few countries without their few Negroes, few great cities without its groups, and thus with this [413] great human force, spread out as it is in all lands and languages, the world must one day reckon. We face, then, in the modern black American, the black West Indian, the

black Frenchman, the black Portuguese, the black Spaniard and the black African a man gaining in knowledge and power and in the definite aim to end color slavery and give black folk a knowledge of modern culture.

There are those who see in the movement only danger—only the silly agitation of would-be fomenters of trouble. They discount it, laugh at it and secretly and openly obstruct it. When the Pan-African Congress planned to meet in Brussels all the industrial exploiters of the Belgian Congo united to misrepresent its objects, distort its actions and punish its local supporters. When the same Congress met in France strong pressure was exerted to keep it from any interference with the investments of French capital in Africa. When the Congress met in England it was dubbed “French” in sympathy and anarchistic in tendency. And yet slowly but surely the movement grows and the day faintly dawns when the new force for international understanding and racial readjustment will and must be felt.

To some persons—to more human beings than ever before at one time in the world’s history, there came during the Great War, during those terrible years of 1917 and 1918, a vision of the Glory of Sacrifice, a dream of a world greater, sweeter, more beautiful and more honest than ever before; a world without war, without poverty and without hate.

I am glad it came. Even though it was a mirage it was eternally true. To-day some faint shadow of it comes to me again.

My ship seeks Africa. Ten days we crept across the Atlantic; five days we sail to the Canaries. And then turning we sought the curve of that mighty and fateful shoulder of gigantic Africa. Slowly, slowly we creep down the coast in a little German cargo boat. Yonder behind the horizon is Cape Bojador whence in 1441 came the brown Moors and black Moors who through the slave trade built America and[414] modern commerce and let loose the furies of the world. Another day afar we glide past Dakar, city and center of French Senegal. Thereupon we fall down, down to the burning equator past the Guinea and Gambia, to where the Lion mountain glares, toward the vast gulf whose sides are lined with Silver and Gold and Ivory. And now we stand before Liberia; Liberia that is a little thing set upon a Hill;—thirty or forty thousand square miles and two million folk; but it represents to me the world. Here political power has tried to resist the power of modern capital. It has not yet succeeded, but its partial failure is not because the republic is black, but because the world has failed in this same battle; because organized industry owns and rules England, France, Germany, America and Heaven. And can Liberia escape the power that rules the world? I do not know; but I do know unless the world escapes, the world as well as Liberia will die; and if Liberia lives it will be because the World is reborn as in that vision splendid of 1918.

And thus again in 1924 as in 1899 I seem to see the problem of the 20th century as the Problem of the Color Line.

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