

THE IWW AND THE BLACK WORKER*

* Among Dr. Foner's numerous publications are: *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vols. I & II, *Business and Slavery, History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vols. I-IV, and *History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States*, vols. I & II.

In 1913 Mary White Ovington, one of the founders of the NAACP, wrote in her article, "The Status of the Negro in the United States": "There are two organizations in this country that have shown they do care about full rights for the Negro. The first is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People . . . The second organization that attacks Negro segregation is the Industrial Workers of the World . . . The I.W.W. has stood with the Negro.¹ The second organization to which Miss Ovington referred, popularly known as "The Wobblies," was founded in the summer of 1905 by progressive-minded elements in the American labor and Socialist movements, headed by Eugene V. Debs, Daniel De Leon, and William D. (Big Bill) Haywood, who were convinced of three basic principles: (1) the superiority of industrial unionism over craft unionism in the struggle against the monopolistic, highly integrated organizations of employers; (2) the impossibility of converting the conservative American Federation of Labor into a type of organization which would achieve real benefits for the majority of working men and women; and (3) the ineffectiveness of the existing organization of the industrial and radical type to build a movement which would organize and unite the entire working class, regardless of skill, color, sex, or national origin. Clearly, in the eyes of these elements, a new organization of labor was necessary, one that "would correspond to modern industrial conditions, and through which the working people might finally secure complete emancipation from wage slavery for all wage workers." It was this conviction that led to the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World.²

At 9 A.M. on June 27, 1955, in Chicago's Brand Hall, "Big Bill" Haywood, militant secretary-treasurer of the Western Federation of Miners, called the 200 delegates representing 43 organizations to order and declared: "This is the Continental Congress of the Working Class." Immediately thereafter he made it clear that the new organization of labor about to come into being would take a definite stand against any and all discrimination based upon race or color. In his indictment of the A.F. of L., which he declared contemptuously "does not represent the working class," he cited specifically the well-known fact that "there are organizations that are affiliated with the A.F. of L., which in their constitution and by-laws prohibit the initiation of or conferring the obligation on a colored man." Haywood pledged that such anti-working-class, racist practices, along with other restrictions on the right of black workers to join the labor movement, would be swept into oblivion by the newly-organized industrial union.³

At a later session, the delegates adopted the Constitution and by-laws of the Industrial Workers of the World, with the motto, "An Injury to One is the Concern of All" (a modification of the old Knights of Labor motto). The first section of the by-laws stated that "no working

man or woman shall be excluded from membership because of creed or color." Haywood in an interview with the press told reporters that though unions affiliated with the A.F. of L., discriminated against a worker who was a Negro, to the I.W.W. it "did not make a bit of difference whether he is a Negro or a white man."⁴

Despite its pledge, the I.W.W. appears to have accomplished little in the way of organizing Negro workers in the first four years of its existence. Torn apart by internal ideological dissensions, and by repeated resignations and expulsions, seriously weakened by the impact of the depression following the Panic of 1907, the I.W.W. hardly organized any workers at all.⁵ In 1909 its membership was down to 3,700 in contrast to the 1,488,872 who were affiliated in that year to the A.F. of L. (A negligible number of these members were Negroes.)⁶ Yet, though it was written off by Samuel Gompers and other A.F. of L. leaders, the I.W.W. was far from dead. In the next few years, organizers of the I.W.W. would make the Wobblies known throughout the nation for their famous free speech fights, and their unionizing drives in the steel and textile industries of the East, the lumber camps of the Northwest and Southeast, the farm lands of the Pacific Coast, and the great Midwest, and the maritime and shipping industries throughout the country. The spectacular rise of the I.W.W. after 1909 would bring the principle of industrial unionism, under which all workers in an industry were organized into one big union, and the principle of labor solidarity, which the I.W.W. preached day in and day out, to the attention of hundreds of thousands of unorganized American workers, including the most unorganized of all — the black workers.

Beginning in 1910, the I.W.W. made a determined effort to recruit Negro membership. Leaflets and pamphlets were distributed in the thousands to convince the black workers that the only hope for remedying the miserable status they faced in American society was through the Industrial Workers of the World. "The Negro has no chance in the old-line trade unions," an I.W.W. leaflet argued. "They do not want him. They admit him only under compulsion and treat him with contempt. There is only *one* labor organization in the United States that admits the colored worker on a footing of absolute equality with the white — the Industrial Workers of the World . . . In the I.W.W. the colored worker, man or woman, is on an equal footing with every other worker. He has the same voice in determining the policies of the organization, and his interests are protected as zealously as those of any other member."⁷ The Negro, I.W.W. literature emphasized, was subject to discrimination, first because of his color, and second because "for the most part the Negro still belongs in the category of the 'unskilled'." This state of affairs could not be wiped out by appeals to sentiment alone. It could only be altered by the organization of the Negro in a union which educated its members to recognize all workers as equal regardless of color, and which organized the unskilled by the only method through which they could be organized — industrial unionism. Such a union was the I.W.W.⁸

All I.W.W. journals participated actively in this educational campaign, including *The Voice of the People*, the Southern organ of the I.W.W. published at New Orleans. The paper was edited by Covington Hall, born in Woodville, Mississippi, in 1871, an Adjutant General of

the United Sons of Confederate Veterans, who became a radical, a Socialist, an active organizer for the I.W.W., especially among Negroes in the South.⁹ Covington Hall regularly featured appeals in *The Voice of the People* urging white workers in the South to remember how racism had always been used by the ruling class to divide black and white to injury of both, and predicting that no real improvement could come to the conditions of either black or white unless they united to destroy the chief weapon of a class that profited by keeping both separated. In an article entitled, "Down with Race Prejudice," published in December, 1912, Phineas Eastman asked his "fellow workers of the South if they wish real good feeling to exist between the two races (and each is necessary to the other's success), to please stop calling the colored man 'Nigger' — the tone some use is an insult, much less the word. Call him Negro if you must refer to his race, but 'fellow worker' is the only form of salutation a rebel should use."¹⁰

Members of the I.W.W. were constantly reminded that the organization of the Negro was an "economic bread and butter" issue. "Leaving the Negro outside of your union makes him a potential, if not an actual scab, dangerous to the organized worker, to say nothing of his own interests as a worker." Race prejudice on the job could only have one result — "keeping the workers fighting each other, while the boss gets the benefits." The idea fostered by the capitalists that the white worker was "superior" was part of the same game. "Actually he is only 'superior' if he shows that he can produce more wealth for the boss than his colored brother can."¹¹ In an appeal directed especially to Southern workers, the I.W.W. asked:

If one of you were to fall in a river and could not swim, and a Negro came along who could swim, would you drown rather than accept his offer of aid? Hardly!

That is the I.W.W. position. Labor organized on race lines will drown. Only organized on *class* lines will it swim . . .

Don't let them sidetrack you from the main line which is, Shall we be freemen or slaves?¹²

The I.W.W. condemned all manifestations of Jim Crowism. It denounced the lynching of Negroes as "savagery," pointing out that it was usually resorted to when Negroes "are demanding more of their product."¹³

In a pamphlet entitled, "Justice for the Negro: How Can He Get It," the I.W.W. pointed out:

Two lynchings in a week — one every three or four days — that is the rate at which the people in this "land of the free and home of the brave" have been killing colored men and women for the past thirty years . . . put to death with every kind of torture that human fiends can invent.

The pamphlet made it clear that "The wrongs of the Negro in the United States" were not confined to lynchings. "When allowed to live and work for the community, he is subjected to constant humiliation, injustice and discrimination. In the cities he is forced to live in the meanest districts, where his rent is doubled and tripled, while conditions of health and safety are neglected in favor of the white sections. In many states he is obliged to ride in special 'Jim Crow' cars, hardly fit for cattle. Almost everywhere all semblance of political rights is denied him.

"When the Negro goes to ask for work he meets with the same systematic discrimination. Thousands of jobs are closed to him solely on account of his color. He is considered only fit for the most menial occupation. In many cases he is forced to accept a lower wage than is paid to white men for the same work. *Everywhere the odds are against him in the struggle for existence.*

"Throughout this land of liberty, so-called, the Negro worker is treated as an inferior; he is cursed and spat upon; in short, he is treated not as a human being, but as an animal, a beast of burden for the ruling class. When he tries to improve his condition, he is shoved back into the mire of degradation and poverty and told to 'keep his place'."¹⁴

In a leaflet entitled, "To Colored Workingmen and Women," the I.W.W. pointed out: "If you are a wage worker you are welcome in the I.W.W. halls, no matter what your color. By this you may see that the I.W.W. is not a white man's union, not a black man's union, not a red man's union, but a working man's union. All of the working class in one big union."¹⁵ On September 19, 1912, the *Industrial Worker* carried the following news report and comment:

Fearing that the I.W.W. will organize the steel mills in the Pittsburgh district the Carnegie Steel Company is importing Negroes so as to create racial hatred and prevent solidarity. It won't work. The I.W.W. organizes without regard to color. The only Negro we fight is he who employs labor. There is no color line in the furnace hells of the steel trust and there will be none in the *One Big Union*. White, black or yellow, the workers of the world must unite!

The I.W.W., unlike most unions of the time and since, practiced what it preached, even in the deepest South where it raised the banner of "No Race, No Creed, No Color," and united black and white workers in a common struggle. This slogan was proclaimed on an international scale. In 1910-11, the Industrial Workers' Union of South Africa, a branch of the I.W.W. founded by Wobbly seamen from the United States, conducted a vigorous campaign to convince the rank and file of the white workers of South Africa "That their real enemy is not the colored laborer, and that it is only by combining and co-operating irrespective of color that the standard of life of the whites can be maintained and improved." The union led the strike of trainwaymen of Johannesburg in which Negro and white workers for the first time united in struggle. The *Voice of Labor*, the I.W.W.'s South African organ, asserted that while the strike was not successful, it had taught "the white and black workers of South Africa some much needed lessons."¹⁶

It is clear that with the exception of the United Mine Workers,¹⁷ which was affiliated to the A.F. of L., the I.W.W. was the *only* labor organization in the second decade of the twentieth century which stood squarely for the organization of Negro workers on the basis of complete equality. The *Industrial Worker*, official organ of the I.W.W. summed up the I.W.W.'s attitude:

In this country every tenth person is of acknowledged Negro descent and a large percentage of these ten million are wage workers. There may be for the whole society of America a Negro problem but with the entrance of the Industrial Workers of the World into the industrial arena there was no further need for the labor problem to be complicated by a racial problem. The I.W.W. accepts the Negro wage worker, asking of

him the same initiation fees and dues as his white brother, and giving him the same membership privileges as are the common property of all who join. The fight of the Negro wage slave is the fight of the white wage slave; and the two must rise or fall together. Their economic interests are identical and an injury to one is an injury to the other . . .

To the I.W.W. there was "no race problem. There is only a class problem . . . The economic interests of all workers, be they white, black brown or yellow, are identical, and all are included in the program of the I.W.W. It has one program for the entire working class—the abolition of the wage system." ¹⁸

Yet it is also clear that the I.W.W.'s answer to the special problems of the Negro people facing discrimination, segregation, deprivation of civil and political rights and violence, was weakened by a failure to understand that for the blacks there was a "race problem," and it was no answer to tell Negroes that in "the abolition of the wage system" lay their salvation. Despite its advanced position against race prejudice and its opposition to segregation in the labor movement, the failure of the I.W.W. to understand the special aspect of the Negro problem restricted its appeal to the black masses.

"How can the Negro combat this widespread injustice?" asked the I.W.W. "How can he, not only put a stop to lynchings, but force the white race to grant him equal treatment? How can he get his rights as a human being?" Protests, petitions, resolutions, all sorts of political movements would, in the eyes of the I.W.W., never accomplish anything. They were a waste of time and money. "The government is in the hands of the ruling class of white men and will do as they wish. No appeal to the political powers will ever secure justice to the Negro." The Negro had only one power to use: "the power to fold his arms and refuse to work for the community until he is guaranteed fair treatment . . . The only power of the Negro is his power as a worker; his one weapon is the strike. . . . When they are in a position to say to any community, 'If you do not stop discrimination against the colored race, we will stop working for you,' the hidden forces behind the government will see to it that lynchings cease and discrimination comes to an end." ¹⁹ This sounded extremely militant, of course, and it was in keeping with the I.W.W. belief in syndicalism and the general strike as the real answer to the basic problems of all workers. But what were the Negroes to do to meet the day-to-day problems that faced them until they had achieved the power to force the master class to alter the pattern of discrimination and exploitation overnight? To this question, unfortunately, the I.W.W. had no real answer.

The failure of the I.W.W. to recognize the Negro question as a special question and its lumping of the problems of Negro workers with those of all workers was quite in keeping with the trend in radical circles of this period. The American Socialist Party, like the entire Second International, also had a very simplistic view of the Negro question. The Socialist Party never really recognized the Negro question as a special question. To the Socialist Party the class question was not only primary but it was exclusive — there was no other social question. All questions, the Socialists thought, would be solved as a by-product of the class question and the class revolution. Just as the I.W.W. thought that all questions would be solved through the general strike. The black question, as assumed loftily by the Socialists, would be solved as a

by-product of the class struggle, without any particular or specific attention to each question in its own terms in its own needs.²⁰ That you might not be able to achieve a Socialist revolution without proper and specific attention to something as vital, as central, in our country as the Negro question, was not perceived either by the Socialist Party or the Socialist Labor Party. That a simplistic class approach might even hinder the efforts to organize the Negro workers was overlooked.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the approach of the Socialist Party and the I.W.W. on the Negro question, even though quite a few Wobblies were members of the S.P.—that is until 1912 when they were expelled presumably for advocating sabotage and “opposing political action.” The Socialist Party made no real effort to organize the Negro, and in the South even regarded Negro membership as a drawback inasmuch as it would alienate potential white members. Since the Negro in the South could not vote and the Socialist Party believed that Socialism would come only through the ballot box, it was regarded a waste of time to recruit black members into the Party thereby driving out white members who alone could vote for Socialist candidates.²¹ To the limited degree that the Socialist Party recruited black members in the South, where the vast majority of the Negroes lived prior to World War I, it organized them in segregated, Jim Crow branches. To its credit, the I.W.W. would have none of this. For one thing, as a syndicalist organization, it opposed political action at the ballot box as a waste of energy, and put its faith primarily in industrial organization and the general strike. Thus the fact that the Negro was disenfranchised in the South was no problem for the I.W.W. in its plans for building unity of black and white workers. Then again, at no time in its history did the I.W.W., even in the deepest South, ever establish segregated locals for black workers. Wherever it organized, members were brought together in locals regardless of race or color.²² In fact, the Industrial Workers of the World is the *only* labor federation in the history of the American labor movement which never established a single segregated local. Even the Knights of Labor which brought large numbers of skilled and unskilled Negro workers into the predominantly white labor movement of the 1880’s—it is estimated that in 1886, when the membership of the Knights exceeded 700,000, there were no less than 60,000 Negro members—segregated its Negro membership. In 1887 there were 400 all-Negro locals in the Knights of Labor, the bulk of them in the South where Negro workers were mainly concentrated. While the Knights did much in breaking down the walls of prejudice, the color line was never really breached and the Order never succeeded in eliminating the barriers between white and black.²³ The I.W.W. did achieve this goal within its ranks.

No statistics are available which indicate Negro membership in the I.W.W. Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris in *The Black Worker* estimate that of the “one million membership cards” issued by the I.W.W. “during the active part of its life” that is between 1909 and 1924, “100,000 cards were issued to Negroes.”²⁴ Actually, no I.W.W. publication ever made such a claim, and it is likely that the Wobblies never succeeded in recruiting a very large Negro membership.

Partly this was due to the fact that many of the great organizing drives of the I.W.W. were in the steel and textile industries of the North,

in Pittsburgh, Lawrence and Fall River, Massachusetts, and Paterson and Passaic, New Jersey, and in these industries prior to World War I, few black workers were employed. (A common employer justification for not hiring Negroes in the textile industry was that "the negro could not work in a cotton-mill, because the hum of the looms put him to sleep."²⁵ Then again, not many Negroes were employed in the lumber camps of the west or in the western agricultural fields where the I.W.W. also made significant headway. The black migratory workers in these industries found a haven in the I.W.W. In *The Messenger* of July, 1923, George S. Schuyler recalled the racial contacts among migratory workers who belonged to the I.W.W. "There was no discrimination in the 'jungles' of the I.W.W.," he noted. "The writer has seen a white hobo, despised by society, share his last loaf with a black fellow-hobo."

The two main areas where the I.W.W. did recruit Negro membership were among the longshoremen and lumber workers in the South. The Philadelphia longshoremen, with Benjamin Harrison Fletcher as their leader,²⁵ constituting one of the most effective I.W.W. units when it was first organized in 1913, was made up primarily but not entirely of Negroes. For years prior to 1913, organization on the docks of Philadelphia had been frustrated by the employers' policy of pitting Negroes and whites against each other, threatening that if one group complained about conditions, their jobs would be given to the other. The I.W.W. entered the picture with the appeal that whether white and Negro liked each other or not, their only hope was to organize into one union. Within a few months the Marine Transport Workers Local 3 had been organized, the majority of its members Negroes, and struck for recognition on May 13, 1913. The strike was supported by ministers of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia who told the *Public Ledger* that the church "liked the I.W.W. because it believed in the colored man." After a strike of two weeks, the dock workers won recognition of their union and the right to bargain collectively. The union's membership by the end of 1913 was close to 3,000 and strikes in 1915 and 1916 completed its control of the docks. By 1916 the union had raised wages for black and white longshoremen from \$1.25 to \$4 a day, time-and-a-half for overtime and double time for Sundays. In keeping with its belief in equality of Negro and white, the local had a rotating system of chairmen. One month a Negro was chairman; the next month, a white member.²⁶

Other locals of the Marine Transport Workers, composed largely of Negro longshoremen, were established in Baltimore, Galveston, and New Orleans, though none were as strongly organized as the Philadelphia local. But all maintained the principle of full equality of Negro and white members.

In New Orleans the A.F. of L. Central Labor Council was a lily-white organization, refusing to admit delegates from the black unions of waterfront workers. In 1910 the I.W.W., under the leadership of Covington Hall and backed by the Dock and Cotton Council, established the United Labor Council. Into this Council were admitted delegates from both white and black waterfront unions, and soon the Council was an important force in the New Orleans labor scene. As in Phila-

delphia, the meetings of the Council were chaired one week by a black and the next by a white waterfront worker.²⁷

One of the most inspiring chapters of the I.W.W.'s organizing activity relates to the lumber industry of the South. The labor force of the Southern lumber industry was made up of both white and Negro workers; indeed, in 1910, over half of the 262,000 workers was composed of Negroes. In the main, the blacks were unskilled workers in the lowest-paid jobs. They did most of the heavy manual work in the saw-mills, on railroads, in the turpentine camps, at skidways, and in the swamps. In 1910, of 7,958 Negroes in the sawmills and planing mills of Texas, 7,216 were laborers; there was not a single Negro sawyer. The St. Louis *Lumberman*, the employers' organ, justified this situation on the ground that "there is a limit to the amount of wages that can be paid with safety to colored laborers around sawmills and wood camps. Too much pay causes discontent and idleness among them." To the Negro lumber workers, notes a student of the Mississippi lumber industry, "emancipation from slavery had not brought the fruits of freedom. He simply had, exchanged his lot for a different system of economic bondage."²⁸

Having stolen the magnificent forests of Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, East Texas, and South Georgia from the public domain, the lumber companies proceeded to operate them as feudal domains, filling the towns with gunmen whom the authorities commissioned as deputy sheriffs, and jailing anyone who questioned their rule. The jails also provided the companies with a cheap supply of labor. Men were seized on the railroads for "beating their way" and sentenced to 90 days in jail. Then these unfortunate workers were forced to toil for the period of their sentence in the turpentine camps. Negro and white laborers were frequently arrested, fined, and imprisoned for no offense at all, or simply for being out of a job and forced to work out their sentence in the lumber camps. Often an employer would arrange to pay the fine on condition that the debt was worked out. In 1904 the Supreme Court upheld laws enacted at the close of the century eliminating peonage, but in the isolated camps in the Southern woods these laws and the Supreme Court decision cut little ice. To be sure, individuals found guilty of establishing peonage could be prosecuted and convicted, but few workers in Southern lumbering, particularly Negro workers, dared to protest to the authorities, knowing that the company-dominated local courts would never convict the guilty parties. "The timber and lumber workers," read a complaint in 1912, "in many places are being practically held as peons within barbed wire enclosures; where there is no law except the will of the Lumber Trust's imported thugs and gunmen."²⁹

For wages as low as \$1.25 a day or average weekly wages of from \$7 to \$9, men were forced to labor ten to twelve hours a day. With a few exceptions, wages were paid monthly, and usually either entirely, or in large part, in scrip or time checks. "Scrip" was simply some substitute for legal money—paper, chits, cardboard coin, metal tags, etc.—which ordinarily bore the name of the issuing company, a valuation and the statement "good for merchandise only." If spent in the company store, it passed at face value; but it could be converted to cash only at a customary discount of five to 30 percent. Since prices in the company

stores ranged from one-third to 50 per cent above prices in surrounding communities, the face value of the wages used for merchandise was always considerably reduced.

The time check bore the condition that it was to be cashed at some future specified date. If the bearer, for whatever reason, cashed it prior to the specified date, he was generally forced to take a discount of from five to ten per cent. Some workers, to obtain legal currency, were forced to borrow from the employer at usurious rates of interest. In other words, these workers were actually paying interest on their wages being withheld from them.³⁰

The great majority of the lumber workers lived and died in communities owned and operated by the mill companies. They were charged outrageous rents for primitive huts heated with open fires. They were forced to pay a compulsory medical-insurance fee, usually \$1.00 to \$1.50 a month, for doctors in whose selection they had no voice and who knew little or nothing of medicine. They were forced to pay from 75 cents to \$1 per month for "accident insurance," which was bought by the lumber company at from 50 to 60 cents per man.³¹

A comprehensive study of conditions in the lumber industry in Louisiana by the State Bureau of Statistics of Labor pointed out: "We found . . . every labor law on the statutes being violated." Following a similar study in Texas, the Commission on Industrial Relations found "that in such communities, political liberty does not exist and its forms are hollow mockery. . . . Free speech, free assembly, and a free press may be denied as they have been denied time and again, and the employer's agent may be placed in public office to do his bidding."³²

Since the A.F. of L. showed no interest in organizing the oppressed workers of the Southern lumber industry, they were required to unionize by themselves. On December 3, 1910, Arthur L. Emerson and Jay Smith and a group of lumber workers in the De Ridder area of Louisiana, most of them sympathetic to the I.W.W. and to the Socialist Party, set up a local union. Emerson, Smith and a few others, who were Wobblies, then traveled in the guise of book agents, insurance solicitors, evangelists, even card sharps, to avoid company gunmen, going from camp to camp, mill to mill, bringing the message of unionism to the lumber workers. By June 1911, enough locals had been organized to set up the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (or B. of T.W. as it was popularly known) as a national union with Emerson as president and Smith as general secretary.

Since Negroes comprised so large a portion of the labor force, the leaders of the Brotherhood knew that no union could be effective in the yellow pine region unless it opened its doors to Negroes as well as whites. The Constitution of the organization allowed Negroes to join, but the Southern tradition of segregation was retained by providing for "colored lodges" which were forbidden to retain their initiation fees and dues but were required to deliver all such funds for safe-keeping to the nearest white local.³³

The B. of T.W. spread rapidly over Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, recruiting Negro and white lumberjacks, mill workers, tenant and small farmers who worked in the lumber industry for parts of the year, and town craftsmen. But the employers quickly struck back. During the summer and fall of 1911 between 5,000 and 7,000 of the most

active members of the Brotherhood, white and Negro, were blacklisted. At the same time, the companies shut down their plants, and announced that they would not reopen them until the Brotherhood had gone out of existence. But, though the lumber workers suffered severe privation, neither the lockout nor the blacklisting destroyed the union. The Southern Lumber Operators' Association then decided to reopen the plants, invite Negro members of the Brotherhood to go back to work at higher wages, and recruit Negro scabs from all parts of Louisiana and Texas to keep the mills operating.³⁴

Neither of these two plans succeeded. No Negro members of the Brotherhood went back to work, and few black scabs were recruited. When the mills reopened in the winter of 1912—the lockout was officially ended by February—it was not with scab labor. By May, 1912, the Brotherhood had a membership of between 20,000 to 25,000 workers, about half of whom were Negroes.³⁵

The experience in the battle against the lockout, the refusal of the Negro members to desert the union and of blacks to scab, had imbued the Brotherhood with a clearer understanding of what it called the "Negro question." In *An Appeal to Timber and Lumber Workers*, the union declared: "As far as the 'Negro question' goes, it means simply this: Either the whites organize with the Negroes, or the bosses will organize the Negroes against the whites, in which last case it is hardly up to the white to damn the 'niggers.' Southern workers ought to realize that while there are two colors among the workers in the South there is actually only one class. It is the object of this organization . . . to teach that the only hope of the workers is through industrial organization, that while the colors in question are two, the class in question is only one; that the first thing for a real workingman to do is to learn by a little study that he belongs to the working class, line up with the Brotherhood of Timber Workers or the Industrial Workers of the World, and make a start for industrial freedom."³⁶

Up to this point, the Brotherhood, though friendly to the Wobblies, had not affiliated to the I.W.W. But with the A.F. of L. still showing no interest in a movement of which Negroes were a substantial number, the Brotherhood turned to the I.W.W. for assistance, and proposed affiliation. When the proposed affiliation was agreed to by the leaders of the B. of T.W. and the I.W.W., the latter organization sent Bill Haywood and Covington Hall, editor of *The Voice of the People*, to the Brotherhood's convention at Alexandria, Louisiana, May 1912, to present the case for affiliation to the delegates.

Arriving at the convention, Haywood expressed surprise that no Negroes were present. He was informed that the Negro workers were meeting separately in another hall because it was against the law in Louisiana for white and Negroes to meet together. Haywood brushed this explanation aside, declaring:

"You work in the same mills together. Sometimes a black man and a white man chop down the same tree together. You are meeting in convention now to discuss the conditions under which you labor. This can't be done intelligently by passing resolutions here and then sending them out to another room for the black man to act upon. Why not be sensible about this and call the Negroes into this convention? If it is against the law, this is one time when the law should be broken."

Haywood was followed by Covington Hall, who told the delegates that he was not only a Southerner, "bawn and raised," but also Past-Adjutant General (National Secretary) of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans, and that he supported Haywood's suggestion completely. "Let the Negroes come together with us, and if any arrests are made, all of us will go to jail, white and colored together."³⁷

The advice was followed, and the Negroes were called into the session. The mixed gathering adopted the proposal of affiliation with the I.W.W. and elected Negro and white delegates to the September convention of the I.W.W. in Chicago, where the merger was to be formally effected.

Haywood and Covington also addressed a mass meeting at the Alexandria Opera House under the Brotherhood's sponsorship. Here, too, there was no segregation, and for the first time in the city's history, Negro and white sat together in all parts of the hall at a public meeting. (Not even the Socialist Party in Louisiana allowed Negroes and whites to meet together.³⁸) "There was no interference by the management or the police," Haywood reported, "and the meeting had a tremendous effect on the workers who discovered that they could mingle in meetings as they mingled at work." The *Industrial Worker* carried the news from Alexandria under the heading: "Miracle of the New South."³⁹

In July, the convention's vote to affiliate with the I.W.W. was overwhelmingly confirmed by the Brotherhood's rank and file membership in a general referendum. At the September convention of the I.W.W., with black and white delegates from the South present, the merger was consummated, and the Brotherhood of Timber Workers became the Southern District of the National Industrial Union of Forest and Lumber Workers.⁴⁰

Space does not permit a full account of the moving history of the Southern lumber workers after the decision to affiliate with the I.W.W. Suffice it to say that it is a history filled with intensive efforts of the feudal-minded lumber barons to destroy the unity of black and white workers and smash the union. In this drive they resorted to every weapon in the arsenal of anti-unionism: blacklisting of union members; arrests and trial of the president and 64 leading members, Negro and white; eviction of union members from company houses; and spreading the charge throughout the South that the union was a revolutionary organization which sought to carry out the I.W.W.'s policy of equality for black and white, which if not checked, would undermine the entire fabric of Southern society. Yet none of these measures succeeded. The men brought to trial were acquitted, after having been held in jail for four months.⁴¹ On November 11, 1913, nine days after the close of the trial in Grabow, Louisiana, 1,300 union men, whites, Indians, and Negroes went on strike at the American Lumber Company in Merryville, Louisiana. This was to be the biggest strike in the Brotherhood's history. Soon after the strike began, the company erected enclosures about the workers' shacks and the mills and began shipping in non-union crews, especially Negroes, from other parts of Louisiana and Texas—men who knew nothing of what had taken place in the mill. The Negro quarters were surrounded with a high barbed-wire fence which was charged with electricity to keep the strikers from talking to the scabs. But the strikers did get to them nevertheless. The railroad track was lined with pickets

four miles on each side of the town, and as the trains carrying the scabs slowed down to enter Merryville, leaflets were thrown through the windows or on the platforms, pointing out that a strike was taking place, and appealing "to you colored wage workers of Louisiana and Texas to do your duty by the lumberjacks of Merryville, white, Indian and Negro."

The appeal brought results. Many Negroes refused to enter the mill, and quite a few joined the strikers, living with the families of Negro strikers. Foreign-born workers and Mexicans who were brought in as scabs also showed their solidarity with the strikers. As the union pointed out in a statement that was widely published:

"It is a glorious thing to see, the miracle that has happened here in Dixie. This is coming true of the 'impossible'—this union of workers regardless of color, creed or nationality. To hear the Americans saying 'You can starve us, but you cannot whip us'; the Negroes saying, 'You can fence us in, but you cannot make us scab'; the Mexicans shouting vivas for the union. Never did the Southern Lumber Operators' Association and the American Lumber Company expect to see such complete and defiant solidarity."⁴²

The unity of Negro and white workers during the strike was so firm that one of the I.W.W. organizers in the area cited it as a lesson for the entire working class which "may feel proud of the solidarity displayed by these fighting timbermen and their wives and daughters . . . For be it known, that the many colored men belonging to the union, are standing pat with their white fellow slaves; and also be it known that the writer has known for years that all the colored workers needed was for the white workers 'to meet them halfway,' and they will always respond, eager and anxious to fight to better their conditions." He pointed out that Negro strikers were arrested and jailed on the charge of "unlawfully meeting in the same hall with white men," but "they laughingly line up and marched to jail, singing the rebel songs they had learned at the daily mass meetings in the Union Hall, and despite threats, after their release, they appeared in greater numbers the next day to hear speakers, and sing more songs to fan the flames of discontent."⁴³

When one worker told a meeting that even though he had nine children, he was willing to strike "if the Union can guarantee food for my children," the following dramatic episode occurred:

When he made his plea for his family every farmer in the audience rose and confirmed the pledge of the one Negro present, who said, 'We farmers and workers will have to stick together in the Union and win this fight, or all of us, white and colored, are going back to slavery. I have so many pigs in my pen, so many heads of cattle in the woods, so many chickens in the yard, and so many bushels of corn and sweet potatoes, and so many gallons of syrup in my barn, and I pledge myself that so long as I have a pound of meat, or a peck of corn, no man, white or colored, who goes out in this strike will starve, nor will his children; and I believe all the white farmers here are ready to pledge the same.'

"They did to a man," quotes Covington Hall in his account of the incident.⁴⁴

Failing to break the strike, the company recruited a gang of thugs and criminals and had them sworn in as deputy sheriffs. The deputies

proceeded to move about the town, molesting Negro strikers and ransacking their homes. On January 9, Robert Allen, a Negro striker, who had been one of the most faithful pickets, was arrested at a union meeting and taken away to jail. No warrant was served nor was any reason given for the arrest. The same evening, Allen was placed in an automobile and deported from Merryville, leaving behind his wife and five children.

The arrests and deportations reached a climax in mid-February when deputy sheriffs, mobs of businessmen and company officials destroyed the union headquarters, and deported all union members from Merryville under penalty of death if they returned. Anyone found with a union leaflet or circular on him was arrested and deported. The town of Merryville was now completely in the hands of the mob as company gunmen, many deputized as sheriffs, armed with rifles, marched through the streets, seizing Negro and white union members and shipping them out of town. The union tried to get Governor Hall to do something to halt the reign of terror, pointing out that under the civil rights bill, the town was liable for expulsion of even strangers without due process of law. But the Governor, charging that the union, by allowing Negroes to meet together with whites in the same union halls, was seeking to destroy the Southern way of life, refused to act.⁴⁵

The four-day wave of mob violence broke the back of the strike. Most of the Negro and white strikers were refused reemployment and blacklisted throughout the entire Southern lumber industry. Everywhere in the South the union met with the same experience: mob violence, attacks by gunmen, arrests and deportation of union members. Appeals to Governors, even to the President of the United States for interference in the illegal company persecution brought only silence. By the spring of 1914, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers had been effectively destroyed. Yet it left behind a noble tradition of militant struggle and labor solidarity, uniting Negro and white workers as never before in a Southern industry. Clearly Selig Perlman and Philip Taft were incorrect when they wrote in 1935 that "The I.W.W. was acutely aware of the danger of raising or even appearing to raise the issue of race equality in a Southern community where even the workers for whom it was leading this fight might have been completely alienated by that issue."⁴⁶ The I.W.W. did raise the issue of race equality in the lumber communities of the South, but it was the lumber companies and their allies, not the workers, who were "completely alienated by that issue."

Beginning in 1916 the I.W.W. launched determined campaigns to organize a number of industries and achieved a large measure of success in the western lumber areas and among the agricultural workers of the Middle and Far West. In 1917-18, it initiated an organizing drive to recruit members in the factories and mills of the East. This drive took place at a time when the "Great Migration" of Negroes from the South to the North was fully under way, and the I.W.W. looked forward to the prospects of bringing large numbers of the black workers newly-entered into northern industry into its ranks.

The I.W.W.'s plans for recruiting Negro workers received a great impetus when it obtained the endorsement of *The Messenger*, a black radical, pro-Socialist monthly published by A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen in New York City. Strongly critical of the A.F. of L.

for its discriminatory policies and refusal to take a stand against affiliated unions which barred Negroes as members, *The Messenger* came out strongly in support of the I.W.W. In its issue of August, 1919, it declared:

The Industrial Workers of the World commonly termed the I.W.W. draws no race, creed, color or sex lines in their organization. They are making a desperate effort to get the colored men into the One Big Union. The Negroes are at least giving them an ear, and the prospects point to their soon giving them a hand. With the Industrial Workers Organization already numbering 800,000, to augment it with a million and a half or two million Negroes, would make it fairly rival the American Federation of Labor. This may still be done anyhow and the reactionaries of this country, together with Samuel Gompers, the reactionary President of the American Federation of Labor, desire to hold back this trend of Negro labor radicalism.⁴⁷

To hold back this trend, an alliance of big business, government and conservative labor officials, set out to take advantage of wartime hysteria to overwhelm and destroy the I.W.W. Denouncing the Wobblies as "traitors," state legislatures passed criminal syndicalist laws which, together with the federal Espionage Act, were to be used to round up and imprison most of the I.W.W.'s active leaders, hundreds of organizers and rank and file members. In 1918 and 1919 the United States government brought 184 members of the I.W.W. to trial on charges of interfering with the war effort and encouraging resistance to the Selective Service Act. Their real "crime" was that they were actively engaged in organizing the most exploited sections of the American working class, including Negro workers, those who were traditionally neglected by nearly all unions affiliated with the A.F. of L. Among the I.W.W. leaders brought to trial was Ben Fletcher, black leader of the Philadelphia branch of the Marine Transport Workers, an organization hated by the employers for its effectiveness in nullifying the traditional practice of playing Negro and white workers against each other to the benefit of the companies.

The defendants were tried in three separate groups in Chicago, Sacramento and Wichita. In Chicago, 101 were convicted and 12 were released during the course of the trial; 46 accused were convicted in Sacramento and 26 in Wichita. Many of the convicted received sentences of up to 20 years in prison. Fletcher was tried in Chicago, sentenced to 10 years in federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas, and fined \$30,000.⁴⁸

Condemning the trials of the I.W.W. leaders as a deliberate effort to stem the drive to organize the unorganized, especially the Negro workers, *The Messenger* launched a campaign to bring about Ben Fletcher's release from prison. Though critical of the I.W.W.'s syndicalist position, W. E. B. DuBois supported *The Messenger's* campaign for Ben Fletcher. "We respect the Industrial Workers of the World," Du Bois wrote in *The Crisis* of June, 1919, "as one of the social and political movements in modern times that draws no color line." In August, 1919, A. Phillip Randolph wrote in his militant journal:

Negro newspapers seldom publish anything about men who are useful to the race. Some parasite, ecclesiastical poltroon, sacerdotal tax gatherer, political faker or business exploiter will have his name in the papers, weekly or daily. But when it comes to one of those who fights for the great masses to lessen their hours of work, to increase their

wages, to decrease their high cost of living, to make life more livable for the toiling black workers — that man is not respectable for the average Negro sheet.

Such a man is Ben Fletcher. He is one of the leading organizers of the Industrial Workers of the World, commonly known as I.W.W. He is in Leavenworth Penitentiary, Kansas, where he was sent for trying to secure better working conditions for colored men and women in the United States. He has a vision far beyond that of almost any Negro leader whom we know. He threw in his lot with his fellow white workers, who work side by side with black men and black women to raise their standard of living . . . Ben Fletcher is in Leavenworth for principles — a principle which, when adopted, will put all the Negro leaders out of their parasitical jobs. That principle is that to the workers belong the world, but useful work is not done by Negro leaders.

We want to advocate and urge that Negro societies, lodges, churches, NAACP branches and, of course, their labor organizations begin to protest against the imprisonment of Ben Fletcher and to demand his release. He has been of more service to the masses of the plain Negro people than all the wind-jamming Negro leaders in the United States.⁴⁹

At first the response to this appeal was not encouraging. This was the period of the great "Red Scare" and the Palmer Raids, and few Negro organizations were willing to speak up for a militant black labor leader convicted of "Conspiracy and violating the Espionage Act." But slowly the defense campaign for Fletcher mounted, and petitions and letters from black and white Americans urged President Harding to pardon the black Wobbly leader and release him from the federal penitentiary. In December, 1921, the Department of Justice in a "Report on all War Time Offenders Confined in Federal or State Penitentiaries," advised the Attorney General against recommending Executive Clemency for Ben Fletcher. The reason is stated quite bluntly:

He was a negro who had great influence with the colored stevedores, dock workers, firemen, and sailors, and materially assisted in building up the Marine Transport Workers Union which at the time of the indictment had become so strong that it practically controlled all shipping on the Atlantic Coast.⁵⁰

Ben Fletcher's sentence was commuted in 1923 by President Harding and he was released from prison. (In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt granted him a full pardon.) After his release, Fletcher remained in the I.W.W. and continued to speak and write on industrial unionism and the need for labor solidarity. "No genuine attempt by Organized Labor," he wrote prophetically in July, 1923, "to wrest any worthwhile and lasting concessions from the Employing Class can succeed as long as Organized Labor for the most part is indifferent and in opposition to the fate of Negro Labor."⁵¹ Fletcher was reported delivering a street corner speech for the Wobblies as late as August, 1931⁵² but by that time the I.W.W. had long been only a shell of an organization. War-time repression had all but destroyed the Wobblies, and what was left when the war was over, was further weakened by a split in the ranks over attitudes toward the Soviet Union and the Communist International, with one group supporting the first Socialist state and another refusing its support because it was not based on the principles of syndicalism which the I.W.W. favored.⁵³ Today the I.W.W. still maintains headquarters in Chicago and occasionally issues the *Industrial Worker*, but essentially it has long ceased to exist.

At no time in its history did the I.W.W. achieve a membership rivaling that of the A.F. of L., and it never succeeded in recruiting the

great mass of black workers even though it would have welcomed them into its ranks. When it was at the height of its influence and power, the vast majority of Negroes lived in the South, were mainly tenant farmers and sharecroppers, and resided in communities where even the attempt to unionize — as the Elaine, Arkansas, massacres of 1919 revealed — would have brought wholesale arrests, imprisonments and lynchings. By the time the Negroes began entering Northern industries in considerable numbers, the I.W.W. was in the process of being destroyed by the government's savage repression.

Yet despite its rapid demise after its rapid rise, despite the fact that it never succeeded in retaining most of the members it organized, the I.W.W. wrote some of the most important chapters in the history of the American labor movement. To many, the letters "I.W.W." still conjure up the picture of a sinister internal enemy of American society, an organization of "bomb-throwing" hoboos, who preached and practiced violence for no reason but to make trouble. The truth is, however, that the I.W.W. made valuable contributions in the campaigns to organize the unorganized (particularly the unskilled, the foreign-born, women and Negro workers), spearheaded the fight for free speech and pioneered the battle for industrial unionism. It united black and white workers as never before in our history, and consistently maintained a tradition of solidarity and equality in the labor movement regardless of race or color that is yet to be equalled by most labor organizations today.

The spirit of the Wobblies fortunately is not entirely dead. It was present last spring and summer in Charleston, South Carolina, when the union-civil rights coalition conducted the successful four-month strike of Negro hospital workers and which ever since has been moving toward higher pay and union recognition for black hospital employees in other cities, North and South. "Union Power Plus Soul Power Equals Victory," is the rallying cry.

The Wobblies were never much for religion, but they called Jesus "Fellow Worker Christ," and they welcomed clergymen who came to their support in their free speech fights and organizing campaigns. They would have appreciated the role that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Reverend Ralph Abernathy and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., played together with Local 1199, Drug and Hospital Workers of New York in organizing the Negro hospital workers in Charleston.

Philip S. Foner
Lincoln University, Pennsylvania

1. *The New Review*, September, 1913, pp. 747-48.
2. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. IV New York, 1965, p. 13; *Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World*, New York, 1905, p. 82. (Hereinafter cited as *Proceedings, First Convention, I.W.W.*)
3. *Proceedings, First Convention, I.W.W.*, p. 18.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 298-99.
5. Foner, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp. 60-95.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13; Frank E. Wolfe, *Admission to American Trade Unions*, Baltimore, 1912, pp. 12224.
7. "Justice for the Negro — How Can He Get It," four-page leaflet, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Collection, (Hereinafter cited as WSHS.)

8. *Solidarity*, June 24, 1911, June 6, 1914; "To Colored Workingmen and Workingwomen," I.W.W. leaflet, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Collection, WSHS.
9. Covington Hall, *Battle Hymns of Toil*, Oklahoma City, n.d., pp. 1-2. (Copy in New Orleans Public Library.)
10. *Voice of the People*, Dec. 14, 1912; *Industrial Worker*, Dec. 26, 1912.
11. *Industrial Worker*, Aug. 1, 1914.
12. *Ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1914.
13. *Ibid.*, June 4, 1910; *Solidarity*, June 8, 1912.
14. "Justice for the Negro — How Can He Get It," *op. cit.*
15. "To Colored Workingmen and Workingwomen," *op. cit.*
16. *Voice of Labor*, reprinted in *Solidarity*, June 24, 1911.
17. In 1910-12, the United Mine Workers with 40,000 Negro members had the largest Negro membership of any A.F. of L. union. See Herbert G. Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America," in Julius Jacobson, editor, *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, New York, 1968, pp. 49-127. For evidence of discrimination against Negro workers in the U.M.W., see Herbert Northrup, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America," *Southern Economic Journal*, April, 1943, p. 322.
18. *Industrial Workers*, Feb. 3, 1917; Sept. 19, 1919.
19. "Justice for the Negro — How Can He Get It," *op. cit.*
20. Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897, 1912*, New York, 1952, pp. 130-35, 260, 282-83; Philip S. Foner *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. III, New York, 1964, pp. 381-82.
21. *The Worker*, Nov. 6, 1903; *Social Democratic Herald*, Nov. 21, 1903; Grace McWhiney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study in Rustic Radicalism," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. XXX, Aug. 1945, pp. 333-35.
22. *International Socialist Review*, vol. XIV, Nov. 1913, p. 275; Herbert Hill *The Racial Practices of Organized Labor — In the Age of Gompers and After*, pamphlet, New York, n.d., p. 4.
23. Sidney H. Kessler, "The Negro in the Knights of Labor," unpublished M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1950, pp. 50-67; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. II, New York, 1955, pp. 69-76; Philip S. Foner, "The Knights of Labor," *Journal of Negro History*, vol. LIII, Jan., 1968, pp. 70-75.
24. Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*, New York, 1931, p. 331; Donald M. Barnes, "The Ideology of the Industrial Workers of the World," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Washington State University, 1962, p. 21.
25. Jerome Dowd, "Textile War between the North and South," *The Forum*, June, 1898, p. 443.
26. Philadelphia *North American*, May 14-30, 1913; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, June 19, 1913; *Industrial Worker*, Feb. 3-24, 1917, July 28, 1945. Information on Benjamin Fletcher prior to his joining the I.W.W. is extremely sparse. We do know that he was born in Philadelphia on April 13, 1890, and that some of his ancestors were American Indians. (*Industrial Worker*, July 22, 1949.)
27. Covington Hall in *Industrial Worker*, July 7, 1945.
28. Ruth A. Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950*, Austin, Texas, 1961, pp. 54, 58; Hollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915*, University of Mississippi, 1962, pp. 142-43.
29. Marcy C. Terrell, "Bondage in the United States," *Nineteenth Century and After*, vol. LXII, 1907, pp. 202-05.
30. G. T. Starnes and F. T. De Vyver, *Labor in the Industrial South*, Charlottesville, Va., 1930, pp. 45, 51; New Orleans *Times Democrat*, July 28, 1912.

31. Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17; *Solidarity*, Aug. 17, 1912. Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, Chicago, 1969, pp. 210-11.
32. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor of the State of Louisiana*, 1916-18, pp. 96, 124-34.
33. Charles H. McCord, "A Brief History of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1959, pp. 19-20, 27; H. C. Creel in *National Rip-Saw*, Nov. 1912.
34. Covington Hall, "Louisiana Lumber War," *Industrial Worker*, July 14, 21, 1945; New Orleans *Times Democrat*, July 20, Aug. 8, 1911; George T. Morgan, Jr., "No Compromise — No Recognition: John Henry Kirby, the Southern Lumber Operators' Association, and Unionism in the Pine Woods," *Labor History*, vol. X, Spring, 1969, pp. 197-200.
35. McCord, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
36. *Voice of the People*, Dec. 25, 1913.
37. *Bill Haywood's Book*, New York, 1929, pp. 241-42; *Solidarity*, May 25, Sept. 28, 1912; Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South," unpublished manuscript, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, p. 138. F. Ray Marshall (*Labor in the South*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, p. 97) cites Covington Hall's unpublished manuscript, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South" (pp. 136-38) as evidence of the fact that "Negroes were segregated at the convention." This was true only until Haywood and Hall urged that white and Negroes meet in the same hall. Hall notes in his manuscript: "The colored delegates came to the hall that afternoon, and no arrests or trouble occurred during the remaining days of the convention." (Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 138.)
38. McWhiney, *op. cit.*, p. 332.
39. *Industrial Worker*, May 30, 1912.
40. *Chicago World*, Sept. 23, 1912; *Solidarity*, Sept. 28, 1912.
41. New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, July 24, Oct. 6, 1912; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, Aug. 12, 1912; *The Rebel*, July 20, Aug. 17, 1912.
42. *Industrial Worker*, Nov. 28, Dec. 26, 1912; *The Rebel*, Nov. 16, 1912; *The Crisis*, Feb., 1913, p. 164.
I.W.W. speakers and newspapers always referred to black strike-breakers as "niggers" and to black union men as "Negro Fellow Workers." (See *Lumberjack*, Feb. 27, 1913.) However, Negroes who acted as strikebreakers in strikes involving craft unions were viewed differently than those who scabbed against an industrial union like the I.W.W. "The whole trend of the white craft labor organizations is to discriminate against the Negro; and to refuse to accord him equal economic rights," declared *Solidarity* on March 18, 1911. "When, as a consequence, the Negro is used to their own undoing, they have no one but themselves to blame."
43. Phineas Eastman, "The Southern Negro and One Big Union," *Internationalist Socialist Review*, vol. XIII, June, 1913, pp. 890-91.
44. Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South," *op. cit.*, p. 149.
45. New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, Feb. 17-20, 1913; *Voice of the People*, Nov. 6, 20, 1913, Jan. 1, 29, March 5, 1914; McCord, *op. cit.*, p. 99; Merle E. Reed, "The I.W.W. and Individual Freedom in Western Louisiana, 1913," *Louisiana History*, Winter, 1913, pp. 61-63.
46. McCord, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-04; *Voice of the People*, Feb. 5, 1914; *Lumberjack*, Feb. 27, 1913; Reed, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-69; Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932*, New York, 1935, p. 247.
47. "Our Reason for Being," *The Messenger*, Aug., 1919, pp. 11-12; "Break Up the A.F. of L.," *Ibid.*, May-June, 1919, p. 7.
48. Philip Taft, "The Federal Trials of the I.W.W.," *Labor History*, vol. III, Winter, 1962, pp. 58-91.

Fletcher was the only Negro among the defendants. Early in the trial, he turned to Haywood and remarked: "If it wasn't for me, there'd be no color in this trial at all." Later, when Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis,

who presided at the trial, handed down the severe sentences, he noted ironically: "Judge Landis is using poor English today. His sentences are too long." (Haywood, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-25.)

Fletcher was found guilty of violation of Section 6,19 and 37 of the Criminal Code of the United States and Section 4 of the "Espionage Act" of June 15, 1917. He was sentenced, the records state, "in the United States Penitentiary at Leavenworth six years on count 1, ten years on counts 2 and 4, and two years on count 3, said sentences to run concurrently and to pay a fine of five thousand dollars on each of counts 1 & 2 and a fine of ten thousand dollars on each of counts 3 & 4 besides the costs in this behalf expended." He was delivered to Leavenworth on September 6, 1918, after having been sentenced on August 21, 1918. On February 21, 1919, Fletcher swore out a writ of appeal of the sentence to a higher court in which it is stated that "because of his poverty he is wholly unable to pay the costs of said writ of error, or to give any security for the same and therefore makes his application for leave to sue out and prosecute the same to a conclusion without being required to prepay any fees or costs or for the printing of the record in said Appellate Court and without being required to give any security therefore." (U.S. versus Wm. Dudley Haywood, Criminal Case No. 6125, Ms. in General Service Administration, Federal Records Office, Chicago, Illinois.) The appeal was turned down by the higher courts.

Interestingly enough, the first conviction for violation of the Espionage Act was also a black labor organizer. On September 14, 1918, Joe Dennis, foreman of a section gang, was arrested for violating the Espionage Act because he had urged a strike on the Texas and Pacific Railroad for better conditions. He was charged with interference with the movement of troops. During his trial, held in New Orleans, Judge Foster charged the jury to bring in a verdict of "guilty if it found the facts bore out the contention of the government attorney, that the defendant has hampered the government in the operation of railroads." After Dennis was found guilty and sentenced to ten years in prison, the New Orleans *Labor Advocate* commented:

"Invoking the Espionage law to convict this Negro appears far-fetched. The intent of that measure, as we understand it, was for a means of handling German spies during the war with Germany. To invoke it to convict a Negro worker because he asked his fellow workers to join him in a demand for living wages not only appears to be wholly inconsistent, but inhuman as well. We believe the judge, whether intentional or not, has taken a step that will stir up considerable more turmoil than he anticipated. To attempt to deny workers the right to strike is a decidedly serious matter."

(Reprinted in *New York Call*, May 29, 1919.)

49. "Ben Fletcher," *The Messenger*, Aug. 1919, p. 28.
50. Miscellaneous Political Records, Political Prisoners, Department of Justice Files, Dec. 10, 1921, TAF/c2c, National Archives, Washington, D. C.
51. Ben Fletcher, "The Negro and Organized Labor," *The Messenger*, July, 1923, pp. 759-60.
52. *Industrial Solidarity*, Aug. 11, 1931.

Fletcher died in Brooklyn, New York, on July 10, 1949. At his funeral more than 100 men and women, most of them long-time Wobblies, were present. Herbert Mahler of the I.W.W. read the following tribute at the funeral service:

"Rest, rest old fighter, rest.
Scars of battle on your breast
Prove that you have done your best,
Rest, rest old fighter, rest.

"In the hands of eager Youth,
Trust the crimson flag of Truth,
That you carried all the way.
They will guard it till the day,
Of Freedom . . .

"Let no worry mar your sleep,
Though the road be rough and steep,
Fraught with danger, filled with pain,
We will struggle on to gain,
The Victory . . .
While you rest, old fighter, rest.

"Rest, rest old fighter, rest,
Your noble deeds by Memory blest,
Inspire us all in Freedom's quest.
Rest, rest old fighter, rest."

(*Industrial Worker*, July 22, 1949.)

53. Philip S. Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor*, New York, 1967, pp. 13-16, 24-26, 64-66, 100, 254-67, 287-88; John S. Gams, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, New York, 1932, pp. 75-125.