

World Conference Hears Voice of Black Labor

By George Padmore

THE wide and representative character of the colonial delegation to the recent World Trade Union Conference was significant and encouraging. It was significant for the fact that for the first time in the history of international labor colored colonial workers—the most oppressed and exploited section of the world proletariat—were given the opportunity of voicing their grievances and of expressing through their trusted leaders their hopes and aspirations. It was encouraging because at the time when the question of a new international is being discussed, the white working-class trade union movements of Europe and America, which have hitherto ignored the existence of the colored workers, are apparently beginning to recognize that "Labor in the white skin cannot emancipate itself while Labor in the black skin is enslaved," and have manifested this awareness by drawing these long-neglected and forgotten millions of colonial workers into the world fraternity of labor.

In this sense the World Trade Union Conference achieved a degree of solidarity which should go a long way towards laying the foundations of the new international federation whose formation it endorsed.

The colonial delegates came from Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia in West Africa; Jamaica in the West Indies; British Guiana in South America; Palestine, Cyprus, etc. It is noteworthy that the Northern Rhodesian Mine Workers Union was represented by a white man, for the color-bar in that colony excludes African miners from entering the trade union.

Colonial Unions Young

While most of the colonial unions represented by these colored delegates are young, they have nevertheless been able to build up substantial memberships since 1938, when trade unionism was recognized in principle for the first time by the British colonial administrations.

The Nigerian Trade Union Congress, which came into being only three years ago, now boasts a membership of 500,000 and 56 affiliated unions, covering transport, mining, dock-labour, seamen, public works, government employees, etc. In the other hand, the British Guiana Trade Union Council,

When the World Trade Union Congress ended its meetings in London's city hall February 24, it was the first time in history that Negro delegates had attended an international labor gathering as representatives of colonial peoples. Seven Negro delegates from Africa and the West Indies participated, and this article tells what they did

with a membership of 10,000, is one of the oldest working-class organizations in the Colonial Empire. It recently celebrated its



Three Lions

Mr. T. Bankole of Nigeria was spokesman for the economic rights of these Nigerian workers. These men are operating sewing machines used in the making of clothes.

25th anniversary and was represented at the Conference by its president, Mr. Hubert Crichlow, who founded and led the movement through its quarter of a century existence. Mr. Crichlow is the representative of the Negro, Indian, and other colored workers of British Guiana on the Governor's Executive Council.

Although most of these colored delegates have served long terms of imprisonment for their working-class and trade-union activities, their speeches to the Conference did not reflect any of the personal bitterness and rancor that one might have expected from individuals who have been the victims of ruthless persecution. For example, T. A. Bankole, the president of the Nigerian Trade Union Congress, addressing the closing session of the Conference on the subject of the new international federation, stressed the need for an all-embracing organization, "At this juncture in world affairs, when labor has adorned its history with glorious achievement in the struggle to overthrow Fascism and to establish a lasting peace, the workers of the world cannot but come together in order to be in a position to contribute collectively to the establishment and maintenance of that peace," Mr. Bankole declared, and went on to say that he thought this was "why the formation of an international trade union organization is a prime necessity." Such an organization, he emphasized, "must be founded on the principle of equal treatment for all affiliated bodies and their representatives, regardless of the countries from which they derive, and must be nurtured in an atmosphere of mutual regard, discipline and candor. It must keep an open door for all approved labor organizations functioning in all lands"—allied, neutral and ex-enemy countries.

Class Solidarity Highlighted

There was nothing of narrow nationalism, racial or chauvinistic, in the speeches of these black men. Every one of them reflected a high level of class solidarity and socialist conviction.

The specific claims of the colonial working classes were voiced by Wallace Johnson, president of the Sierra Leone Trade Congress, who a few weeks before his ar-

rival in London had been released by the British Government after five and a half years' imprisonment and exile to Sherbro Island off the coast of West Africa.

Mr. Johnson called upon the Conference not merely to confine its condemnation to Fascism, which is not the only enemy of the working-classes. "Imperialism," asserted Johnson, "is for the colonial workers as great a menace as Fascism is to the workers of the metropolitan countries of Europe."

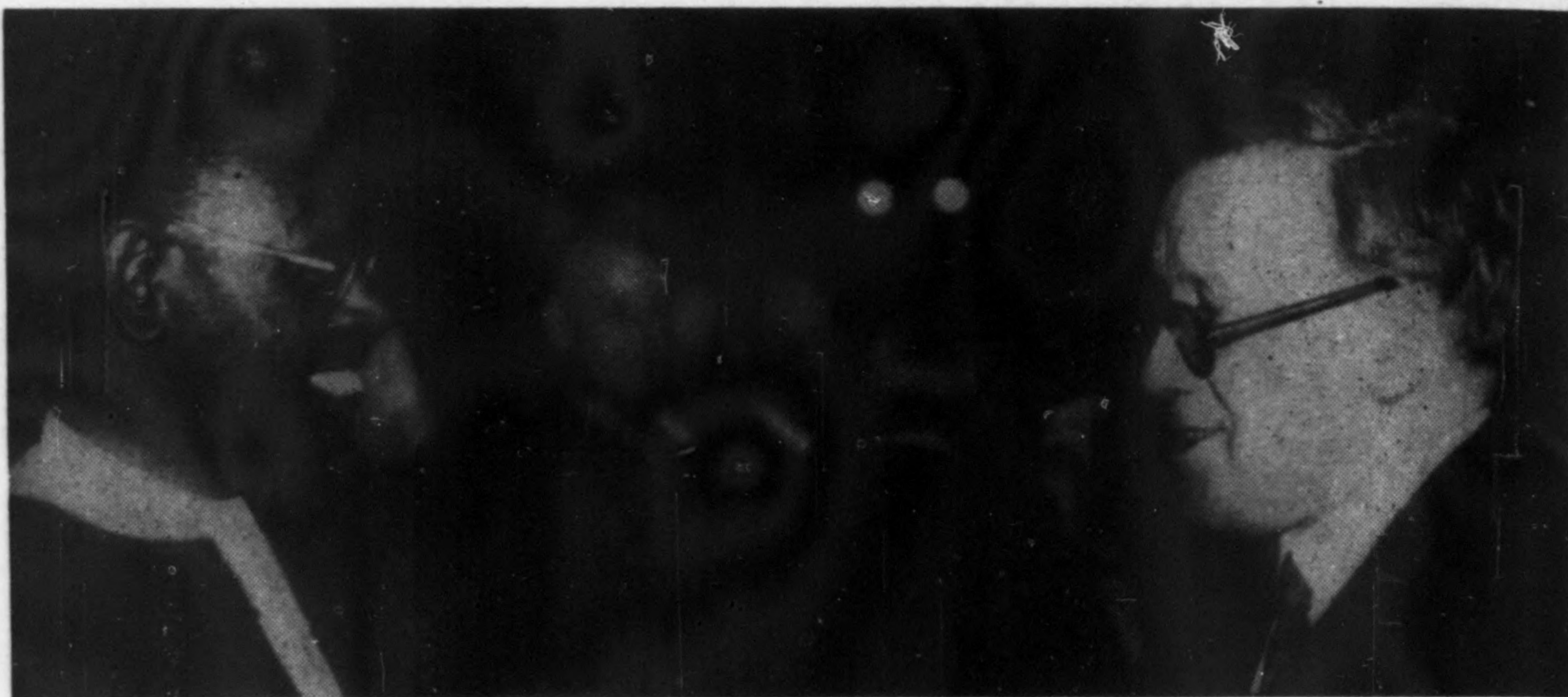
He, therefore, appealed to the Conference to endorse and support the following immediate demands, unanimously approved and adopted by all the colonial delegates as a Charter of Labor for the Colonies:

1. The abolition of the Color-Bar and all racial discrimination in public and private employment.
2. The abolition of forced labor, child labor, and all forms of slavery, open or disguised, abolition of flogging and other forms of punishment for breach of labor contract as well as penal sanctions for breach of labor contract.
3. Abolition of all pass-laws legislation and the establishment of the right of free assembly, free speech, free press, free movement.
4. Equal pay for equal work, irrespective of race, color, creed or sex.
5. Abolition of racial restrictions against the admittance of African and other colored workers into existing white trade unions (South Africa, Rhodesia, etc.). And wherever such restrictions continue to operate Africans and other colored workers should have the right to create separate and free trade unions.
6. Trade Union and Social legislation existing in the Colonies should be brought into line with those existing in the metropolis, or conversely, the same trade union and social legislative principles operating in the metropolitan countries should be made applicable to the colonial territories.

Concluding his speech, Wallace Johnson reminded the Conference that "Justice, like Peace, is indivisible, and the world today cannot remain half free and half slave."

Hill Speech Refreshing

In an eloquent speech, Ken Hill, representing the Jamaica Trade Union Council, the most progressive section of the organized workers' movement of that Caribbean colony, called for the extension of the principle of self-determination enunciated under Article 3 of the Atlantic Charter to the colonial peoples. There is no doubt that he brought to the deliberations of the Conference a comprehensive vision and international outlook as refreshing as it is rare at such gatherings. Hill suggested that "it would be unthinkable if this Conference through its committees did not put forward declarations expressing progressive views on



British Combine

A picture taken at the reception given by the LCC to delegates to the World Trades Union Conference. Herbert Morrison is shown shaking hands with I. M. Garba-Jahunpa of British Gambia, West Africa, at the reception. Dr. Somerville Hastings, chairman of the LCC, welcomed the 230 delegates from trade union centers in 42 countries at a reception held at the County Hall, Westminster Bridge, London.

the colonial question. To do less," he asserted, "would be to leave the world to be betrayed into another war within the present generation."

While recognizing that the indomitable purpose of the free and democratic trade union movements of the world is to crush Fascism wherever it raises its ugly head, Ken Hill declared: "But we must go further. We must take care that in our preoccupation with this historic task, we do not fail to take steps and use the influence of the international working class movement to discontinue the system of Imperialism and Capitalist domination, whatever shape or form they take."

Mr. Hill based his appeal on the contention that one of the main causes of modern wars is the rivalry among the Great Powers for colonies as markets, sources of raw materials, spheres of economic influence, and strategic bases for aerial, naval and military operations. Consequently, there can be no lasting peace until this conflict over colonies is liquidated, and with it the whole system of Fascism, Nazism and Imperialism—all of which derive from capitalism.

He maintained further that the world working class should act so that those countries which are represented at such Conferences should "be judged not merely by the size of our contributions to arms and supplies of war, but by the moral values which our unity and association can engender for lasting peace and prosperity in the best interests of the working men and women of the world."

Inspired by what may promise to be the rebirth of the united labor movement, these black men from the far-flung parts of the British Empire will shortly be leaving London for their respective countries to continue the struggle not only for national liberation from the fetters of Imperialism, but also for the economic and social emancipation of the down-trodden workers and peasants for whom they speak.

CONVERSATION ON V

"They got pictures of V stamped on letter stamps;
Miss Eagle wear one in her lapel to her red cross suit;
Mr. Bigful, the bank president, got one in his lapel too;
Some of the people I do laundry with got great big ones in they windows;
Hadley Brothers Department Store uptown got pictures of V on they storebought dresses,
Even got a V ice cream dish—girls selling them so fast had to run up a sign: NO MORE V SUNDAES;
And bless God, Lucy done gone up North and come back with one gleaming on her pocketbook.
Now let's get this straight: what do them V's mean?"
"V stands for Victory."
"Now just what is this here Victory?"
"It what we get when we fight for it."
"Ought to be Freedom, God do know that!"
OWEN DODSON.

CIVIL SERVICE

My desk sits facing yours across the floor,
Yet your fair head is stiffly held aloof
From my own darker one, though 'neath our roof
With one accord we do a job. For war
Has linked us as no pleading could before.
Yet, seemingly, you wait for further proof
That we are spun the same . . . the warp and woof
Of new, strong fabric, draped at Freedom's door . . .
For you are still reluctant to obey
The impulse that would bring you to my side;
You send your memos on a metal tray,
And coldly kill each overture I've tried.
Why hope to rid charred continents of gloom
'Till we have learned to smile across a room?

—CONSTANCE C. NICHOLS