

North Caring For The Negroes Of The Great Migration

(Continued from last issue)

Work of the Urban League

Soon the work of the Urban League grew to gigantic national proportions. Now it has offices in charge of League-trained workers in forty cities in the United States. Its annual budget is now \$250,000. And Eugene Kinckle Jones, who is not unknown to fame or oratory, is still on the job. Through its field workers, Negroes trained at Harvard and Yale, it gathers and disseminates the facts of the Negro problem, and all phases of it.

It publishes a monthly magazine, "Opportunity," which is edited by Mr. Charles S. Johnston, Director of Investigations and Research, a graduate of the University of Chicago, and one of the six Negroes appointed by Governor Lowden on the famous Chicago Race Commission.

L. Hollingsworth Wood, a prominent Juaker lawyer of New York, is president of the League. William H. Baldwin, son of the founder and fiscal agent for Fisk University, is secretary. On its Board of Directors are many of the most prominent men on the continent.

From October 16 to 19 of last year, the Urban League held its annual convention at Kansas City. Delegates from every part of the country were in attendance. In addition to League workers, there were representatives of large employers of Negro labor, each of whom presented the attitude of the employers with regard to the induction of Negro labor into Northern industries.

It might be well here to state that the concerns represented, all large employers of Negro labor, felt that the experiment was a successful one and that the Negro workers were just as competent and as desirable as any other. It was felt, however, that too much cannot be done in the way of safeguarding the Negro from the possibilities of a business depression, the action of a manufacturing concern in Middleton, Ohio, which has provided for the utilization of surplus Negro labor by constructing camps and encouraging farming and truck gardening, and so on, being used to illustrate the sort of thing the larger employers should be prepared to do.

In the steel district of Pittsburgh, according to the executive secretary of the Pittsburgh Urban League, estimates of several steel officials indicate that from ninety to ninety-five per cent of steel mill work is unskilled, therefore it is reasonable to suppose that practically all of the 16,000 Negroes representing twenty-one per cent of the working force in 23 mills of that district are almost entirely engaged in common labour. This supposition will be strengthened when it is considered that prior to 1916, there were no Negroes employed at all in 19 of these 23 mills.

In spite of the official classification of so large a part of the work done by Negroes as unskilled, the observer is inclined to consider any workman skilled who quickly learns to synchronize his movements with machine operations, so as not to slow up their

normal production. Whether steel officials agree with this interpretation or not, they testify that Negroes adapt themselves readily to the work. Frequent reports of production records being broken with smaller crews of Negroes than crews of foreigners doing the same work, might be attributed largely to the eagerness of Negroes to make good and to earn more money with which to re-establish their families in the North.

Conditions Then and Now

During the first years of the war, when a Negro obtained a job in most mills, he had to make friends with the groups of white workmen to stay, but under present demands for labor, Negroes are gradually being advanced according as they show qualities of dependability, efficiency and leadership. Foreign leaders of Negro gangs are gradually being displaced by Negro straw bosses. This policy seems to have been adopted by several corporations, even where Negroes form less than one-third of the gangs. In one plant employing 2875 Negroes, there are thirty-five Negro straw bosses, directing the work of 883 men, 273 of the laborers being foreigners.

In most of the larger steel mills usually an equal number of Negro straw bosses may be found. This is very significant. The greatest difficulty previously experienced by Negroes entering the mills was the lack of sympathy and understanding and oft-times hostility shown them by these foreign straw bosses. One result of the increased use of Negro straw bosses is the reported length of time three-fourths of the Negro employees remain in mills. It has been increased from an average of one month during the war to three and a half months at the present time.

Efficiency engineers say that Negroes have constitutions which render them peculiarly efficient at work in high temperatures. Negro foremen have been found performing other work, some including the direction of skilled white workmen.

The experience of Negro labor in two small mills, Park Works of the Crucible Steel Company and Clark Mills of Carnegie Steel Company, can be cited to give a better indication of how well Negroes may ultimately intrench themselves in larger plants into which they are just being absorbed. Both of these plants introduced Negro labor more than thirty years ago on the occasion of a strike. They have used an increasing number ever since. The Park Works employs about twenty-five per cent. Negroes and the Clark Mills forty-two per cent. Negroes are employed as grinders, heaters, shearers, chippers, rollers, squeezers, ruffers, crane operators; in fact, work on practically every job in the mill. Both plants employ Negro millwrights who repair all the machinery. In addition, the Park Works has a Negro chemist in charge of three white subordinate chemists. They also employ a Negro draftsman. At one time, before the recent depression, a Negro civil engineer was employed. At the Clark Mills, according to their own statement, no limitations were placed on Negro workmen. They cite the case of "Daddy Clay" who developed into one of the greatest experts on shaft steel in Pittsburgh. For years he earned from fifteen dollars to forty dollars a day.

As for the mills recently entered by Negroes, there are unusually illuminating evidences of the progress they have made in the more skilled work. Bonuses on every ton run the workmen's pay often to twenty dollars a day. Reports of extraordinary wages have brought thousands into the steel industry. Disillusioned, they work but a few days, then join the army of steel work floaters, try out mills everywhere, hoping by accident they may stumble into a job paying big money.

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