

THE BASIS OF SERVITUDE
By James Oneal

(Editor's Note: This is the second installment of a new booklet, "The Next Emancipation", written by one of America's foremost historians, James Oneal. It has been published to sell at cost, 10¢ postpaid, by the Negro Labor News Service, P.O. Box 66, College Station, New York City, or 2653 Washington Blvd., Chicago.)

Rockefeller is an American capitalist. He is interested in important mines in Colorado. Some years ago a strike occurred in these mines. Some terrible massacres of men, women and children followed by hired gunmen.

The Rockefeller agents did not attack Greeks, or Poles or Negroes. Nor did they refrain from attacking American miners. All were attacked alike. The Rockefeller interests wanted cheap LABOR. They did not care whether Greek, Polish, Negro or white American workers supplied this labor power.

The masters do not draw the color line, or the religious line, or any lines of nationality. The masters of labor in all ages have acted the same way. The real division of humanity is between mastery and slavery. Color, religion and nationality are mere incidents. Masters will use the color line, or religious differences, or differences of nationality, to divide workers. They will stir these prejudices for this purpose. But masters themselves do not divide along these lines when they face the toilers in a struggle.

The capitalist master is a capitalist master, whether his skin is black or white. The wage worker is a wage worker, whether his skin is black or white. If the black worker works for a white master he does not improve his lot by working for a black master. The white worker is not a free man because a white capitalist employs him. He is robbed just the same as the Negro worker is.

The great fact for both white and Negro workers to understand is that as wage workers they have common interests. WAGE LABOR unites them in the same class. Both sell their labor power for wages. Both must sell it to capitalist owners of mills, factories and mines. Masters want to purchase it at a low price, and workers want to sell it at a high price.

Another truth to remember is that the white worker has no interests bound up with the white capitalists. Because their color is the same is no proof that their interests are the same. Likewise, the black worker has no interests bound up with the black banker or capitalist. Their color is the same, but the way in which each gets his living makes all the difference in the world.

Having established the fact that, whether the master is white or black makes no difference to the workers, let us go a little farther. How does the Negro worker earn his living? By selling his labor power. The white worker gets his living the same way. No difference at all.

Now, then, to whom do they sell this labor power? To each other? Of course not. One wage worker does not purchase the labor power of another wage worker, not even if one is a Negro and the other is white. Not if both are Negroes or both are whites. Whether white or black, the worker must sell this labor power to a capitalist, the owner of a factory, a mine, machinery, buildings, etc.

However we look at this question we find that the wage worker has the same interests with all other wage workers, whether black or white. The Negro worker wants as good a price as he can get for his labor power. So does the white worker. The Negro wants what short hours he can get. So does the white worker. The Negro worker wants all the power he can obtain through organization to get good wages and shorter hours. So does the white worker.

Again we see that the interests of both are the same. Both do not always see it this way, but we do not always see or understand what is the truth. If we did there would be no poverty, no race prejudice, no robbery of labor. There would be no need of writing this pamphlet if the truth were evident to all workers of all colors.

Let us get back to that labor power which Negro and white workers both sell in order to live. Not being able to sell it to each other, they sell it to somebody else. The buyer is a capitalist owner of mills, factories, mines or plants, as the case may be. His plants and machinery are of no use to him unless he can purchase labor power. The labor power you sell him is used to transform raw materials into the finished product. Other wage workers sell labor power to other capitalists in extracting the raw materials from the earth. Still other workers sell labor power to other capitalists to transport the raw materials to the plant where you transform them into the finished product.

Without this labor power which Negro and white workers sell, all industrial society would be paralyzed. The owners of the raw materials, the transportation agencies and the plants of production might die, but industry would go on just the same. If wage workers all died the whole system would come to a standstill. You are essential; the owners are not.

Now, a worker might sell his labor power for generations, if he lived that long, and he would never become rich. But a capitalist can buy labor power for a few years and become comfortably wealthy. The reason for this is that the wage workers add extra values to the raw materials, and when the finished product is sold the capitalist owner gets the extra values. The wage worker reproduces his own value, wages. He receives these wages in payment for his labor power. But, in addition to reproducing his own wages, he produces something more, and this something more is taken by the capitalist owner. By taking it from hundreds or thousands of workers employed by him he is able to become wealthy.

(To be continued)