

MARCUS GARVEY'S PROGRAM

By James Oneal

(Editor's Note: This is the fourth 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.)

Marcus Garvey claimed to have a program that means the liberation of the Negroes of the world. Somebody may again advance his views so we will consider them. It was his idea to create a Black Africa ruled by the Negroes. He would drive out the whites and create an Africa for Africans.

Now, it is true that the whites in Africa have practically stolen the territory which they possess. They have acquired their holdings by force, fraud, invasion, war and conquest. They have enslaved Africans and established white mastery in Africa. They have established governments in violation of self-determination. They have exploited and robbed the Africans, and continue to do so unmercifully.

Exploitation in Africa

But the Negro worker should not forget this: The white masters in Africa have also mercilessly robbed the white workers who have gone to that country. Only a few years ago (March, 1922) there was a strike of miners on the Rand. In dealing with that strike the white masters were just as brutal and ferocious in suppressing the aspirations of white wage workers as they have been in suppressing the aspirations of the native blacks.

Here again there is no color line in exploiting wage labor.

A Negro Capitalism?

Suppose Garvey had succeeded in his program of driving out the whites and creating an Africa for Africans. What would this mean for Negro wage workers who go to Africa? It means that Negro capitalists would own the mines, ranches, railroads, factories and other forms of producing wealth. The Negro workers who go to Africa would have to sell their labor power to Negro capitalists, just as they now sell labor power to white capitalists. In other words, Garvey would have had the Negro aid in establishing a Negro capitalism in Africa instead of the white capitalism which now rules there!

What advantage would this be for the Negro worker? None at all. He would simply change the color of the skin of the men who skin him, that is all. The program does not even have the merit of the Colonization Society in the old days of slavery in the South.

The Case of Liberia

In those days Liberia was established in Africa as a home for Negroes who became free in the South. When the Negro went to Liberia he did not go from one chattel slavery to another. But Marcus

Garvey urged the American Negro to leave American white capitalism for a black capitalism in Africa! Queer way to emancipate the Negro worker!

Consider further: With Negro capitalists owning the mines, railroads, ranches, factories and plants of production, the Negro wage workers would be dependent on those Negro capitalists for a chance to live. The Negro workers would have to organize their trade unions to raise wages and reduce the hours of labor.

Classes Would Persist

Suppose a strike occurs. Would the Negro capitalists, controlling the government, use the courts and military powers against the Negro workers as white capitalists use the courts and military powers against white workers here? Of course they would. The mere fact that the African capitalists' skins were black would not change matters. Capitalists act the same way in all countries, no matter what the color of their skin may be.

Strikes and struggles of Negro workers in an Africa for Africans would be dealt with in about the same way that they are dealt with in all other countries. There would be a Negro mastery over Negro wage workers. The class lines would be the same as in all other capitalist countries. The Garvey program would have had Negro workers help to establish another capitalist mastery on this earth instead of abolishing one.

American Action Needed

It is much better for Negro workers to stay in America and join with white wage workers in abolishing capitalism here rather than helping to establish a black aristocracy of capital in Africa. The first has some promise of hope; the second none at all. Negro capitalists might well favor a Garvey program, but Negro wage workers have everything to lose by supporting it and nothing to gain.

Suppose Africa does become an Africa for Africans. Garvey did not carry with his program any solution of the problems of black wage workers. Why should the Negro travel many thousands of miles to live under a black capitalism? Is the journey worth the trouble? If he is a wage worker under a white capitalism here, he would be a wage worker under a black capitalism there.

A black capitalism in Africa would produce for Negro wage workers the same conditions that all wage workers face in the United States. Negro wage workers would have to organize to abolish a black capitalism that sustains a Negro capitalist class. They would have to organize their labor unions and these unions would be bitterly fought by black capitalists. Courts would be used by Negro capitalists and against Negro workers. The military and police powers would also be used against Negro workers when the masters thought necessary.