

Jim-Crowism, Sheer Hunger, Rife in Harlem

Negroes Discriminated Against by Bosses in Many Ways

By Cyril Briggs

The roots of Tuesday's stormy events in Harlem can be traced directly to the intolerable starvation conditions and residential overcrowding inflicted upon the Negro masses by the city administration, relief agencies, private employers and piratical landlords.

In Harlem, two out of every three Negro workers are unemployed. Job discrimination by the big utilities—the I.R.T. and B.M.T. subways, the New York Telephone Company, the Metropolitan Insurance Company, etc., and even by local white firms doing business in the community, is another one of the underlying causes of Tuesday's events. The deliberate capitalist policy which decrees that Negroes cannot be employed in other capacities than as porters, scrub women, etc., is practiced even by the white firms doing business in Harlem, firms which are dependent upon Negro patrons for support.

Discrimination in Relief

Job discrimination is supplemented by callous discrimination in relief by the city authorities. The "liberal" LaGuardia administration follows the example of the lynch rulers of the South and gives starving Negroes 26 per cent less in relief than workers in other sections of the city. In Harlem, the average relief per family is only \$28, compared to average monthly city relief of \$41 per family. In February, the Harlem relief supervisor, Victor Suarez, spent, on his own admission, only \$214,000 to feed, house and clothe more than 7,500 Negro and Latin-American families on relief. Only \$12,000 was spent on clothing, or at \$1.60 per family!

In addition, hundreds of Negro and Latin-American families are denied any relief whatever, and are threatened with arrest and deportation when they apply for relief. Of the 12,000 families dropped from relief last month, a number far out

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of proportion to the average for the city as a whole live in Harlem.

LaGuardia's Red Herring

No demagogic attacks by Mayor LaGuardia on the Communist Party and militant Negro and white workers, no red-baiting by the vile profascist Hearst press can conceal this terrific indictment of the jim-crow capitalist system. Tuesday's events were an undisciplined expression of the pent-up anger of the Negro population against jim-crowism in jobs, relief, against exorbitant rents and unhealthy housing conditions, against police brutality and the savage persecution and oppression of the Negro population at the hands of the white ruling class, its courts and other agencies of oppression.

Behind its vicious red-baiting, even the capitalist press is forced to speak of the economic causes of Tuesday's events. Thus, the New York Times yesterday carried a story of rent-gouging by unscrupulous landlords, Negro and white, under the heading, "Harlem Ills Laid to Rent Gouging." The article quotes statements by the leaders of several tenants' organizations to the effect that landlords are squeezing "the last penny" from their tenants, are carrying out wholesale evictions in Harlem, and blacklisting tenants who organize to fight against their exactions, including even tenants who "gave shelter to an evicted tenant." Charges were made that Negro tenants are forced to pay \$60 and \$70 rent for an apartment that would be let to white tenants for \$36. The landlords, organized into an association, attempt to suppress all resistance by the tenants. In this they are ably aided by the courts and police.

Exorbitant Rents

These exorbitant rents result in the doubling up of families and fearful overcrowding, with an appalling increase in sickness, the death rate and prostitution. One leader of a tenant organization stated: "They are desperate. It is not that they don't want to pay. They just can't. The white people can always move, if the rents are raised, but the Negro is just like being in a box. He can't go and live somewhere else in the city and so he is forced to pay.

... and so they have rent parties. They sell whiskey or refreshments and they dance and play the numbers game. One vice leads to another. They invite young girls in for the party. Prostitution? It is common knowledge at rent parties."

It is to these appalling conditions that Tuesday's events can be directly traced. And it is on the LaGuardia administration, and the whole capitalist set-up in the city that the responsibility for these conditions rests. Certainly not on the Communist Party which has vigorously fought against these conditions, uniting the Negro and white masses in their day to day struggles against starvation and, as on Tuesday, defeating the attempts of the bosses and their press to incite race riots and set unemployed white and Negro workers fighting each other.

Aided by Same Negroes

In their attacks on the Communist Party and the Negro masses, the bosses are not without agents in the ranks of the Negro people themselves. James H. Hubert of the National Urban League is reported by the capitalist press as "blaming" Tuesday's events on

"agitators." Yet it was Mr. Hubert's own organization which in a report on unemployment among Negroes, admitted that "the number of unemployed had grown, and that they were suffering to a greater degree than other workers. . . . The inequalities in the Negro's occupations are glaring. They are forcing the race into poverty, immorality and despondency."

The National Urban League reported further that "at no time in the history of the Negro since slavery has his economic and social outlook seemed so discouraging. The present period of unemployment is sapping the foundations of Negro family life. . . ." In Harlem, it reported an increase of 330 per cent in relief cases in the period of one year.

The report was issued in March, 1931. Since then conditions have grown incomparably worse.

What Kind of Investigation

Despite the existence of this and other studies of Harlem conditions, Mayor LaGuardia now makes the empty gesture of appointing a committee to "investigate" social and economic conditions in West Harlem. But will the Mayor's committee investigate the city's discrimination in relief against Negroes? Will it investigate the pestilential conditions in the Harlem Hospital, generally known in Harlem as the Butcher Shop—conditions of discrimination against Negro physicians and internes, neglect and ill-treatment of patients, against which Harlem workers have repeatedly protested? It must be remembered that it was to this butcher shop that Negro workers shot down by the police last Tuesday were bundled off. One of the wounded Negro workers died in this hospital Wednesday morning. Several others are reported near death.

Meanwhile, Mayor LaGuardia has launched another investigation—a drive against the Communist Party and the militant Negro workers of Harlem—an "investigation" designed to whitewash the city's responsibility for the conditions which led up to Tuesday's events, an investigation aimed at outlawing the Communist Party and jailing the militant Negro and white workers who defended themselves against police attacks, and whose activities defeated the attempts of the police and the boss press to incite to race riots.

The Negro people of Harlem, supported by the workers and intellectuals throughout the city, must defeat the efforts of the city administration to cover up its crimes against the Negro people. Demand an open investigation of relief and job discrimination, of jim-crow oppression of the Negro people. Demand the release of Negro and white workers arrested in the police terror drive against the people of Harlem! Demand the withdrawal of the army of police thugs and spies from Harlem!

Philadelphia Councils To Hold Relief Parley Sunday in Trades Hall

PHILADELPHIA, Pa., March 21.—A conference, to which all organizations have been asked to send two delegates, has been called by the Unemployment Councils, to be held here Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock at the Needle Trades Hall, 913 Arch Street.

The conference will discuss the new attacks upon the jobless under Roosevelt's new "social security" bills, and will formulate plans for the organization of the unemployed to resist relief cuts and carry forward the fight for H. R. 2827—the Workers' Bill.

A representative of the National Committee of the Unemployment Councils will speak.