



FRANK R. CROSSWAITH

THE FUTURE IS OURS

By Frank R. Crosswaith,

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It is with a deep and sincere sense of personal, race and class pride, that I join in the salvo of thrice-merited, salutation to the officers and members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters on the occasion of their 11th Anniversary.

The story of American labor, like the struggle of the world's workers, is replete with examples of courage, heroism and sacrifice in the face of the callous stubbornness and cruelty of the organized exploiters of labor. Albeit, the page written by the Negro Pullman Porters is one that will continue to stand out in the annals of labor like an illuminated meteor in a dark and starless night. The soldiers of labor's cause must never be permitted to forget that fateful August night eleven years ago, when enveloped by the suffocating heat of a summer's night and the stifling

smoke from a hundred cigars, cigarettes and a few pipes, several hundred Pullman Porters defiantly threw down the gauntlet of battle to the nation's mightiest industrial monarch—The Pullman Company.

Demonstrating a courage hitherto unsuspected among Negroes in industrial warfare, these men at that meeting launched a crusade that has won for them the plaudits of their race the respect of their employer and the gratitude of all labor. "They fired a shot" that literally was heard "around the world." It was the Pullman Porters Union which did more than any other group of workers in America to awaken the labor movement to the serious menace of the Company Union. Until the porters turned upon this modern device of industrial tyranny the pitiless light of publicity and exposed to public scorn and ridicule the soulless carcass of "the Employee Representation Plan", American labor, by and large, was inclined to under-estimate the evil. Today the Company Union in all of its disguises is known as the evil incarnate it is; a dragon to be beheaded whenever and wherever it raises its nefarious head or discloses its poisonous fangs.

That The Pullman Company would fight every inch of the way to protect and preserve its hitherto uncontested privilege of waxing wealthy at the expense of the unsuspecting Negro, was expected by the leaders of the Pullman Porters Union; also, that the Company was a foe rich, powerful, influential and a seasoned veteran in the class war was well known to these leaders. And so from the outset, the porter's fight took the turn not merely of a group of workers seeking to organize as a necessary first step to a higher standard of wages and work conditions, but

a fight involving the manhood, womanhood and self respect of the Negro group. Although the Company was able to reach a few professional Negro leaders in political, religious and educational life, even these were powerless to stem the conquering spiritual tide which the campaign unleashed. No form of terror and intimidation was effective to stem this tide. The threatened lynching of Bennie Smith in Florida not only did not scare or lessen the ardor of the Union, but instead fired the souls of the members to a new heat and steeled their will to win. Attempted bribery, assault, open and covert intimidation and discharge of the more fearless porters, all failed of their desired effect upon the porters and the leaders of their Union. Thus a New Negro was fashioned in the crucible of industrial conflict. The old Negro was no more. A new day had dawned and black American labor was definitely moving out of the shadows of social and economic slavery into the lighted path that leads to power and pride regained.

Considered in the light of the modern problems predicated upon a highly mechanized industrial order, concentrated wealth and intensified class antagonisms, the organized Negro Pullman Porters have done more for their race than all the noble efforts of all the Negro rebels during the days of yesterday's slavery. But the Brotherhood must not yet rest content upon the laurels of past achievements for the fight is not yet won nor is our victory yet complete.

In ever increasing numbers, Negroes are leaving the old cotton fields and tobacco plantations of the South, and finding a place in modern industry. These kin-men of ours must not only be organized into the union of their trade, but they

must have an instrumentality with which to fight for complete equality of treatment within the organized labor movement. Facing the problems of race, nationality and sex prejudice among workers, Jewish, Italian and women proletarians developed their own agency and today these groups receive more consideration than does the Negro. Given the full and sympathetic support it deserves, the Negro Labor Committee will serve the Negro worker as the United Hebrew Trades, the Italian Chamber of Labor and the Women's Trade Union League serve their respective group.

Upon every hand are potent signs indicating the march of Fascism, Hitlerism and other foes of civilized progress. In the fight against these evils, the Negro must find his place. As the economic system of private monopoly and human exploitation continues to demonstrate its unworkability, the danger to all our democratic institutions becomes more obvious. In the fight to preserve our gains and win for the working masses everywhere the full social value of their labor, the Negro worker must play an heroic part. Led and inspired by the examples of the Brotherhood and its fearless leader, Negro labor will lay upon the sepulchre of economic and social depotism a wreath woven from the fragrant roses of struggle during the years since August, 1925.

In the future as in the past, I doff my hat to the Brotherhood and hail its officers and members in the grand and glorious comradeship of the workers' world which we who work must ourselves build.

Forward Builders, the future is ours.