

before long, went back to the black laborers.

The European laborers that they imported did not give any satisfaction in the work in which some degree of skill was to be exercised. It was out of the question to try to induce them to undertake a piece of work in which there was some element of danger. The reckless abandonment with which the blacks tackled these hazardous jobs commanded the admiration of even the white tyrants of the South. A day never dawned that the life blood of a black laborer did not sprinkle the soil of the canal. Their blood mixed with the mortar and cement to make them more cohesive, and the massive walls of the locks and dams more secure. And then the end came. They saw their efforts and sacrifices translated into the greatest success of the age. Was it not human for them to expect some kind of consideration from the Panama authorities?

The wave of high prices which swept over the world also affected the canal workers. To meet the increased prices of commodities, the wages and salaries of the white men were raised. These men, it will be remembered, were already enjoying privileges in the shape of gratuitous houses, fuel, transportation, amusements, etc. However, the authorities did not feel that the wages and salaries of the blacks called for any such consideration. With an increase in the prices of ordinary necessities ranging from 200 to 400 per cent, an increase in salary of two to three per cent was allowed the black workers. Orderly representations to the responsible heads availed nothing. Organization as the logical and effective means of obtaining relief was resorted to. A local organization was effected which subsequently affiliated itself with the "United Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees and Railway Shop Laborers," with headquarters in Detroit.

The delegates sent down to organize them collected \$125,000 from them, and left with all kinds of assurances and promises of support in the event of trouble, promises which were never meant to be kept. Feeling assured of the support of the brotherhood, the men went on strike for more equitable compensation. That was in 1920. To render the strike ineffective, that is, to break it, the Metal Trades Council, a labor organization which comprises all the white

working men on the Panama Canal, along with their wives and children, mothers and sweethearts, became scabs. They offered their services to Governor Harding, who readily accepted. They immediately filled the vacancies left by the striking blacks. With the assistance of the officials of the Panama Republic native laborers were corralled to do the laborers work.

The strike was broken; but at a tremendous loss to the government. It is said that the loss sustained through the misappropriation of goods by the scabs amounted to thousands of dollars. The minimum salary paid those who filled the places of the clerks was \$100 a month, while the maximum salary paid the colored men was \$60. The men were told they could return to work. The administration took this opportunity to cut its labor force to the minimum. In spite of the invitation to return to work the most courageous of the blacks refused to return. As a measure of reprisal the governor ordered the effects of every striker, who occupied government quarters, to be thrown out. The police and soldiers rudely violated the privacy of the people's homes, threw everything out—their wives and children along with the furniture. Women who were in delicate state of maternity received less consideration than would have been accorded beasts. It is said that several women gave birth to infants while they were being driven out.

Not satisfied with the brutal attack upon the helpless people, Governor Harding, it is said, ordered the authorities of the Panama Republic to keep the fugitives out of Panamanian territory. As a compromise the government of Panama imposed a \$500 revenue tax upon the already destitute people before they were allowed to enter the City of Panama.

The men went back to work; that is, those who, on account of the responsibilities of a large family, were not financially able to return to their native homes. They were re-employed at a reduced rate of pay. The present wage scale is so low that the poor blacks are barely able to ward off starvation. To them working for the Panama Canal is a matter of compulsion. They have either to accept the low wages or get out. Imagine a man with a family of, usually, four to six children making two ends meet on an income of \$40 to \$60 a

month. How much can he save from that to enable him to transport this large family to his native home? It is out of the question to quit. The only economic activities are conducted by the Canal Zone authorities. To him there is no outlet. The paltry and niggardly wage at least keeps him and his family half-fed. And so, with bitterness in his heart, and a curse on the heads of the American people for having enslaved him, he carries on.

The argument which the canal authorities advance for justifying the payment of such low wages to the black working men is interesting to say the least. They will tell you, if you were to ask anyone of them, the "Niggers" can live on what is paid them; that's enough to keep them happy; and their standard of living is so low that they can get along on what they are getting. Facts, however, don't bear out their argument. In the first place, the needs for mere subsistence of these working men are never met no matter how frugal they may be. They and their families are undernourished. In the second place, people who are forced to live with the elemental wants half-satisfied cannot be happy. A satisfied group of workers do not go on strike for a decent living wage. Finally, the standard of living of the people is low because their tyrannical masters so wish it. They did not deliberately choose that low standard of living. Can a high standard of living be maintained on a \$60 a month income?

So much emphasis is laid on the question of the lower standard of living of the blacks that a little light thrown on the situation down there will help to clarify the matter. Here is the truth about the situation: The black employees procure their necessities from the same source from which the whites purchase theirs—the government commissaries. They pay generally more for the same kind of commodities than the whites pay. For their shelter they pay the same rent that the whites pay and receive absolutely inferior quarters. While the quarters occupied by the whites are provided with all the modern conveniences, the blacks, paying the same amount for theirs, have none generally. They are forced to use

community toilets, baths, and washing sheds. There is little or no privacy in connection with these community affairs. For example, the toilet and bath of men and women are under the same roof with simply a low partition between them; these conditions certainly do not foster high standards.

There are a few black Americans in the employment of the Panama Canal. These fare a trifle better than their brothers from the Islands. Their wages are higher and their quarters a little more adequate. Nevertheless, the wages which they receive never equal that which the whites receive for the same kind of work. They have to submit to the humiliating discriminations which the others suffer. It is made known to them by inference that the Canal Zone is a white man's territory.

The reference made in the preceding paragraph to discrimination has served to arouse in the mind of the writer certain facts concerning the peculiar form of discrimination practiced by the Canal Zone officials. With them, theoretically, discrimination is not based on color. In the southern sections of the United States one sees conspicuously displayed in public places and semi-public places "for white" and "for colored" signs. Although the Canal Zone represents the transplanting from Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, etc., of the very worst form of race hatred which these states can boast of, these signs have not made their appearance there. Instead of them, the eyes of the visitor are arrested by "For Gold" and "For Silver" signs. It must not be inferred that certain classes of the canal employees are gold-made and others silver-made. The fact is, the discrimination is based on the kind of money in which the employees receive their remuneration. All citizens of the United States are paid in gold, that is, in the legal tender of the United States. All black employees and the unskilled European laborers are paid in silver, that is, in the currency of the Republic of Panama. The white men are known as "gold" employees and the black men as "silver" employees. Although the black Americans are paid in gold they are barred from the places where the white "gold" men go. On