

Democratic Temper of Negro Vets

By CLAUDIA JONES

THE "strangest" excuses are used to prop up discrimination against Negro veterans by people who should know better. Usually, when Negro and white citizens protest against discrimination, the charge is hurled against them that they are "subversive." Likewise the hack argument is used—straight from the mouths of the Wall Street-Southern Bourbon catechisms—"why worry, Negroes are 'happy' by themselves anyway."

A case in point is the new twist used by an official in a Chicago Veterans hospital, who, on meeting with Negro veterans protesting the Jimcrow set up in the Veterans Administration, said: "Since peace and quiet is most necessary, I believe if segregation tends to eliminate friction, then the hospital should be operated on that basis."

This is one for the books. Let us see how this argument of Col. Warren A. Colton of the Edward A. Hines Veterans Hospital in Chicago fits reality. Apparently, according to Hines, "peace and quiet" should have reigned in Columbia City when an entire Negro community was razed by militia men and police officials and two Negro citizens were killed. Apparently, the Ferguson brothers who were Jimcrowed to death, should have had no "friction" with Patrolman Romelka because after all they were segregated.

I didn't tell you that such arguments were not at all swallowed by these Negro veterans. Their rapid-fire questions to Hines made him retreat rapidly. They reminded him of the "war bond ideals" set up by the United States government dealing with the rights of man. Whereupon he became embarrassed and said that he was only an "employee of the Veterans Administration and was obliged to carry out orders originating in Washington."

Perhaps the significant aspect of this whole incident was that these Negro veterans represented the Provisional Committee for a National Veterans Organization, who are meeting in Chicago on April 6-7 to form a National Veterans organization which will fight for their democratic rights, their educational and GI benefits and against lynch violence and terror.

The Chicago action is indicative

of the vets' temper and their aims. Their chief desire is for an organization in which they can have full dignity and manhood rights; one which will fight for their demands on a state-wide, community-wide level. Throughout the country, they are organizing among themselves, first of all. A wholesome sign of their maturity is: their desire for co-operation and collaboration with labor and progressive groups, and with their white brother veterans, because they realize that only thus can their just demands be achieved.

There is need, however, for a much more aggressive support on labor's part to the problems faced by the Negro veteran. When it is considered that the Big Business, Southern Bourbon lynch violence against Negroes is directed primarily against Negro the veteran, it becomes evident that the Negro vet will be an even more powerful ally of labor once labor begins to fight more aggressively for his needs.

NOT 2ND CLASS STATUS BUT EQUAL RIGHTS

This obvious conclusion is strengthened on surveying the unanimous and correct conclusions of the Negro press which holds that the existing veterans' organizations offer second-class status to Negro vets. It is likewise incumbent on progressive white veterans to support the demands of Negro veterans, everywhere.

The Negro veteran is not in a

temper for second class status, but for full citizenship. Such is seen in the action of the 12 Negro airmen who applied for commercial pilot jobs but were turned down by the lily-white Eastern Airlines. It is evidenced in the organization of the Alabama Veterans Association, who came from 26 towns and cities in Alabama. It is seen in their demand for their right to vote when they marched on Jefferson County Courthouse in Alabama. The first act of these vets in conference was to unanimously reject the much-publicized Gillem Report (which proclaimed that the War Department has "ended army Jimcrow") as a "gratuitous insult" to the aspirations of the Negro people.

Negro and white veterans who have participated in these recent struggles will attend the national organizing conference in Chicago on April 6 and 7. Honorary chairman of the organizing group is Joe Louis. Support for their efforts have already been received from Secretary Henry A. Wallace, and other notables. Many prominent figures such as Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown and others are scheduled to speak.

Labor especially, and Negro and white veterans might well view this coming conference as a signal opportunity to weld strong ties with the Negro veteran who seeks unity and support to his fighting demands for peace, security and full citizenship.

Worth Repeating

In an article discussing Churchill's Missouri speech Louis Quintanilla, secretary of the Pan - American Union, said: "Mr. Churchill pulls out the usual red-baiting argument—Communism. It must be eradicated. Why? Because 'the Communist Parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization.' Exactly the words of Francisco Franco! And, minus the word 'Christian,' exactly the argument brought forth by the original Axis powers to justify the formation of Axis Number 1. . . .

"If our hemisphere policy should ever become entangled in a diplomatic or military scheme designed to set up an English speaking Axis against our great Soviet ally, millions of bona fide democrats, throughout Latin America, would be the first to denounce our Pan-American ties."—From the Washington Post, March 16, 1946.