

The Truth on What Happened in Harlem Not a "Race Riot"

By Frank D. Griffin. Field Organizer, International Labor Defense, New York District.

New York.—With four men dead from the bullets and clubs of police, with scores horribly injured, with eleven persons under indictment in a shameful frame-up designed to cover up the truth, with two courts rapidly grinding out jail sentences on any and no evidence against the 150 citizens placed under arrest...

Fiercing the fog of conflicting rumors, and the barrage of lies and slander against the Negro people and the militant white workers of Harlem, that have been diligently spread by city officials, by police and by the press led the yellow lynch-sheets of William Randolph Hearst, the I. L. D. investigation has been able to establish definite and significant facts concerning the Events in Harlem.

Not a "Race Riot." What happened in Harlem was no "race riot," although this term has been used almost exclusively by the press to describe the Harlem events. There was no general anger against Harlem's white working class population. The tales of a lynch-sheets, white working people are deliberate lies.

What happened in Harlem was not an "outburst of savagery," as the Hearst press would have it, nor were the much-advertised theft and looting more than sporadic, insignificant, negligible incidents in the whole affair.

The Harlem events were not "instigated by agitators attempting to set one race against another," as city officials attempt to show in their frantic efforts to throw up a smoke-screen that will hide their own guilt.

The events of the past ten days in Harlem were a revolt against twentieth century Negro slavery in New York. An undisciplined, spontaneous revolt, it is true. But nevertheless, basically, an expression of the long pent up anger of the people of Harlem, tormented by hunger and the stormy indifference of relief agencies, infuriated by the denial of the right to work even in their own community, tortured and goaded by the sight of children huddled in overcrowded tenements, terrorized by police trained in the best traditions of Southern peon farm and chain-gang, humiliated and shamed daily and hourly by the thousand and one petty insults, abuses, meanness degradations of the elaborate complex, subtle Jim Crowism that holds sway in New York. Hunger, terror, joblessness and humiliation were the tinct that awaited only the spark of some particularly brazen act of oppression. On March 19 that spark kindled a flame of revolt that swept through Harlem like a prairie fire fanned by a high wind.

These are the truths which hundreds of Negro and white citizens are ready to present to the mayor's committee when it meets in open session next Saturday. These are the facts which led the International Labor Defense and other militant organizations to demand that the city set free the arrested workers, indict and try the police responsible for the killings and beatings of the last few days, put an end to police brutality, abolish discrimination and Jim Crowism in New York in its every form. These facts will form the basis of the defense by the I. L. D. of seven workers, three of them Negroes, now under indictment in a monstrous frame-up designed to cover the truth about Harlem.

...ers except in positions of porters and scrubwoman. This particular store has within the last few months been the scene of militant picketing by Negro and white workers, demanding that Negroes be among those hired as salesgirls and floorwalkers, and in all the better paying jobs.

At about 4:30 on the afternoon of March 19, a young boy entered the store. He was accused by salespeople of attempting to steal some small article from one of the counters. Because the boy was a Negro, it was almost a routine matter to seize him, and drag him to the basement to beat him unmercifully.

Negro and white shoppers saw the incident. A committee of men and women, coming in a number of whites, sprang up spontaneously, went to the rear of the store, demanded to see the manager. They asked that the boy be set free. The manager refused satisfaction. The crowd inside the store waited, tense and angry. A rumor that the boy had been taken to the 121st Street Police Station sent the delegation flying here. The police rushed them out of the station, and would give no answer to their inquiries about the boy's life and safety.

The Police Arrive Then the cry: "Bring that boy upstairs. Turn him loose. Quit beating him!" was taken up outside the store. A crowd gathered swiftly. Almost as once the police arrived. There was no doubt in the minds of the police as to the proper course of action. These people were "niggers"—if only to be shoved about, beaten, kicked, mauled and arrested. Clubs descended on shoulders and heads. Mounted police clattered up, their horses charging from sidewalk to sidewalk, ruthlessly trampling the people. Policemen fired their guns into the air.

These are all the customary police methods of terrorizing Harlem's population—and now they were applied again, once too often. From mouth to mouth flew the word: "We got the right to our own sidewalks: We got the right to protect our kids. Don't let them shove us around." The word was taken up by the crowds pouring out of the neighborhood theaters and subway entrances. There was still no news of the boy who had vanished into the depths of the store.

It was now, according to the testimony of dozens of eye witnesses, but the police proceeded to define, open provocation. Miss Louise Thompson, well-known Negro intellectual, who was on the scene from the beginning, describes the attitude of the police at this point as deliberately egging on to attack them.

Police Provocation "Come on hit us, we dare you!" the police yelled. They colored Harry Gordon, a white youth, punched him, and shrieked in his face: "Hit a cop, will you, you bastard." From one cynical, brutal policeman to the other were branded the words: "God-damn niggers, ought to be strung up like they do 'em in the South."

"Few feet of rope's good enough for 'em. 'Hitler has the right idea—he'd know how to deal with these niggers." The sentences were punctuated by blows, kicks, and cuffs, aimed at all Negroes and white workers within reach.

The fury of the crowd took form. Someone threw a brick through the window of the Kress store—this store that had so long taken their pennies, that had so long spit in their faces when they asked to work. Around the front of dozens of white owned business houses, from which Negro work-

ers were barred as employees, a crowd gathered, venting its long-accumulated wrath. Stores owned by Negroes, stores hiring a share of Negro labor, were passed by. Nor were there attacks on white workers, many of whom mingled freely with the crowd. On this point the accounts of all eye witnesses are unanimous.

Someone suggested setting fire to certain stores. Above these stores lived poverty-stricken white workers. "Those white working folks suffer plenty in those upstairs tenements. Leave them alone," was the word that passed through the crowd. And those houses remained untouched.

Police Kill Four. One or two hours was not enough to express the suffering of years. Not until almost dawn were the streets of Harlem quiet. By that time, three men had been carried away, dead or dying, first victims of the police assault. James Thompson died of a bullet fired by a patrolman. Andrew Lyons died of injuries inflicted by police clubs. These were Negroes. August Miller, a white man, was the third victim of the policemen's blood lust. These murders were followed by the deliberate killing, on Saturday, of a Negro worker, Edward Laurie, who dared to "talk back" to a white patrolman.

In an attempt to distort the character of the revolt, police and newspapers made much talk of looting and robbery. All eye witnesses but policemen and others with a stake in the oppression of Negro Harlem are agreed on this. There was almost no looting. And equally significant what looting there was consisted of the taking of food and clothing alone, the necessities of life which these people had been systematically deprived.

Almost 150 arrests took place that Tuesday night. Police laid their hands on the people nearest, dealt them a few blows as a foretaste of beatings to come, and flung them into patrols. I want to give here the accounts of some of those who passed that night in the Harlem jails. Their stories rival those that have come out of the Nazi Germany's concentration camps to shock the world.

I talked with Frank Wells a young Negro, while he was still doubled up with the pain of beatings he had received in the police station. A brick had gone through the window of the Willow Cafeteria. Police ran down the street, one of them seizing Wells, who had had nothing to do with the brick. One policeman felled him with a blow, another jumped on him. At the 123rd Street police station he was hit in the ribs with nightsticks, beaten with a rubber hose, which descended in regular rhythm across his face, his head, his shoulders.

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Legal Notices

Attorney Ray L. Williams, Room 200 Tushman Bldg., 24th and Lake St.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION

In the County Court of Douglas County, Nebraska: In the Matter of the Estate of Hattie Williams, (Johnson), Deceased. All persons interested in said estate are hereby notified that a petition has been filed in said Court alleging that said deceased died leaving no last will and praying for administration upon her estate, and that a hearing will be had on said petition before said court on the 11th day of May, 1935, and that if they fail to appear at said court on the said 11th day of May, 1935, at 9 o'clock A. M. to contest said petition, the Court may grant the same and grant administration of said estate to W. L. Myers, or some other suitable person and proceed to a settlement thereof.

Bryce Crawford, County Judge Ends 5-11-35

Attorney Ray L. Williams, Room 200, Tushman Bldg., 24th and Lake St.

PROBATE NOTICE

In the Matter of the Estate of Houston Murdock, Deceased. Notice is hereby given: That the creditors of said deceased will meet the administrator of said estate, before me, County Judge of Douglas County, Nebraska, at the County Court Room, in said County, on the 10th day of June, 1935, and on the 10th day of August, 1935, at 9 o'clock A. M., each day, for the purpose of presenting their claims for examination, adjustment and allowance. Three months are allowed for the creditors to present their claims, from the 10th day of May, 1935.

Bryce Crawford, County Judge Ends 5-4-35

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Attorney Ray L. Williams, Room 200, Tushman Bldg., 24th and Lake Street.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION

In the County Court of Douglas County, Nebraska: In the Matter of the Estate of John White, Deceased. All persons interested in said estate are hereby notified that a petition has been filed in said Court alleging that said deceased died leaving no last will and praying for administration upon his estate, and that a hearing will be had on said petition before said court on the 18th day of May, 1935, and that if they fail to appear at said Court on the said 18th day of May, 1935, at 9 o'clock A. M. to contest said petition, the Court may grant the same and grant administration of said estate to Joseph D. Lewis or some other suitable person and proceed to a settlement thereof.

Bryce Crawford, County Judge Ends 5-11-35

Attorney Ray L. Williams, Room 200, Tushman Bldg., 24th and Lake Street.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION

In the County Court of Douglas County, Nebraska: In the Matter of the Estate of Ellen White, deceased. All persons interested in said estate are hereby notified that a petition has been filed in said Court alleging that said deceased died leaving no last will and praying for administration upon his estate, and that a hearing will be had on said petition before said court on the 18th day of May, 1935, and that if they fail to appear at said Court on the said 18th day of May, 1935, at 9 o'clock A. M. to contest said petition, the Court may grant the same and grant administration of said estate to Joseph D. Lewis or some other suitable person and proceed to a settlement thereof.

Bryce Crawford, County Judge Ends 5-11-35

on the 18th day of May, 1935, and that if they fail to appear at said Court on the said 18th day of May, 1935, at 9 o'clock A. M. to contest said petition, the Court may grant the same and grant administration of said estate to Joseph D. Lewis or some other suitable person and proceed to a settlement thereof.

Renewing the Pledge of Service

By R. A. Adams (For The Literary Service Bureau) Sometimes, I would be satisfied, All efforts cease, and cast aside Ambitions fond, content to be From worries and from strivings free. Thus thinking, with what I possess, I'd live a life of happiness, And, satisfied with what is done, Calmly await life's setting sun.

And yet, a something from within, Reminds me 'twould be an awful sin, To let life's precious moments fly, While all my talents rusting lie. Then, banishing the guilty thought, Knowing, in spite of all, I ought Still labor on, till life is spent, Striving for human betterment. My pledge of service I renew, Fully resolve, with might, to do Whatever work my hands may find, To serve and bless my fellowkind.



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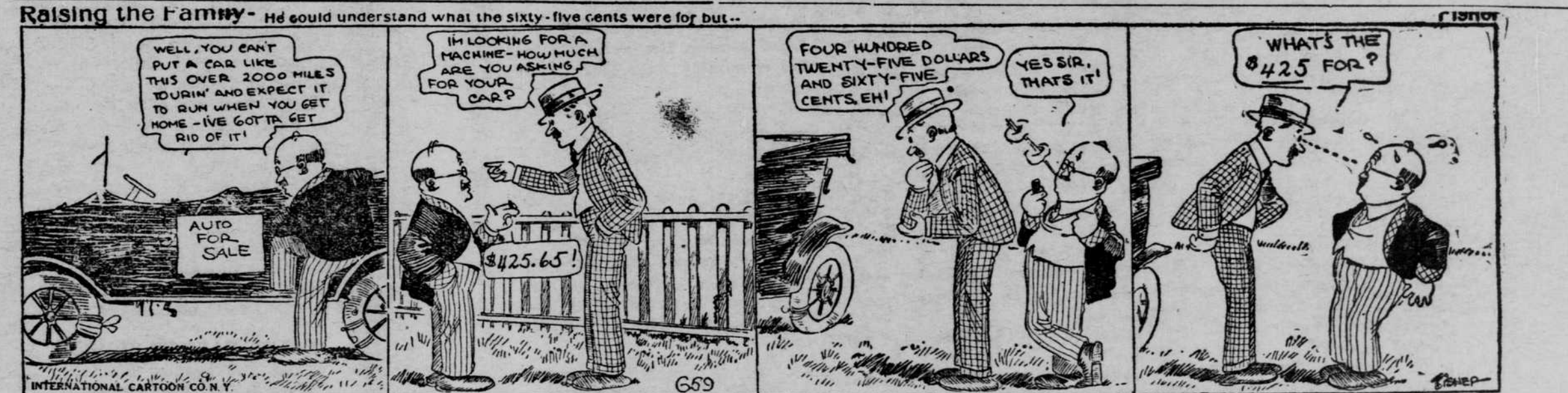
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