

Hitler Makes British Drop Color Bar

By George Padmore

THE devil was sick, the devil a monk would be. The devil was well, the devil a monk was he. This age-old gibe epitomizes the relations between John Bull and his colored subjects in the present war. As long as Britain was at peace the Colonial races were despised; they were the "lesser breed without the law." Then it was easier for the proverbial camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a Negro to enter the Royal Air Force. Now that England is engaged in a life and death struggle to maintain not only her Empire, but her very national existence, the colored races are being wooed as never before to join up.

This *volte-face* is best manifested in the recent decision of the British Government and High Command to abolish the Color Bar in the Imperial Forces of the Crown, especially the Royal Air Force, until now the exclusive preserve of Anglo-Saxons.

Such fundamental changes do not reflect the personal whims of Whitehall statesmen, nor are they to be interpreted as a manifestation that democratic freedom is being extended to the non-self-governing sections of the Empire, such as India, Africa, the West Indies, etc. The new policy is quite simply opportunistic. It is dictated by the imperialist needs and influenced by the present military problems confronting Britain since the collapse of France and other Continental allies.

In order to realize fully the significant implications of this decision to abolish the Color Bar for the duration of the present war, it is necessary to review the traditional attitude of the British military authorities to their Colonial subjects, especially during the last World War.

Colonies' Contribution

In Republican France, Negroes served as an integral part of the army, but this has never been the case with the British army. The reason for this was geographical and political. France, as a continental power with a smaller population than her traditional enemy—Germany—had to convert Africa and other overseas possessions into reservoirs of cannon fodder. England, on the other hand, relied upon her navy for security. Owing to island formation, Britain could afford to do without a large standing army. Her Imperial Force was employed chiefly in garrisoning India,

Here is the most revealing article yet to come out of Britain on the all-important question (to Negro Americans) of the effect of the war on England's notorious color line

Burma, Singapore and other Colonial outposts of the Empire. In times of international crisis, these white troops were augmented by conscripts from home and levies from the Dominions and Colonies.

It was only during the last World War that Indians, Africans and West Indians were called upon to play any part of importance in the defense of the British Empire, largely as a consequence of the campaigns in Africa and the Near East, where the climate favored the use of colored troops in large numbers. It was in these theatres of war that the King's East African Rifles, the Royal West African Frontier Force and West Indian Regiment distinguished themselves. Others also saw service on the western front.

The cost of this participation of the African native in the war may be judged from the official figures for the campaign against the Germans in Tanganyika, East Africa. "14,000 Kenya natives were in the British armed forces and some 150,000 were used as unarmed porters," says this report. "Of these, 4,300 armed natives were killed or died of disease and 43,318 unarmed porters perished, almost entirely from disease contracted owing to the conditions of the campaign. The Germans on their side threw into the struggle some 11,621 Africans. In other parts of Africa, especially the campaign in the Cameroons, the natives felt the heavy impact of the war. Over 200,000 Africans served in the French armies. In 1917, there were 31 Senegalese battalions on the Somme. Most of them were wiped out."

Dr. Nowman Leys, the distinguished British colonial authority, passes a trenchant verdict upon this tragedy to the black race. "Our own war," he writes, "has destroyed more life than a generation of inter-tribal wars among native races in Africa."

Man power was not all that the Colonies supplied, however. They made also very substantial economic and financial contributions to Britain's war effort. India, "the brightest jewel in the Imperial crown," gave more raw materials

and money than all the white dominions. It is no exaggeration to say that England exploited to the limit her colored races. Space does not allow of a detailed account of the methods employed in achieving these ends in all the different colonial countries. As the West Indies are now being drawn more and more into the orbit of Yankee imperialism, I shall make these islands the subject of the confined survey to which I am limited by the scope of this article. These territories are destined to play an increasing role in Anglo-American relations in this present war, and it is therefore well that Americans—white as well as colored—should be made aware of the sacrifices of the Caribbean natives.

The West Indies' Support

Let me begin with Jamaica, the largest and most important of the islands. Nine contingents, totaling about 10,300 men, were raised for active service abroad. The island paid the whole expenses of these contingents amounting to £1,000,000, of which £11,000 was raised by public subscription. In addition, money contributed from commercial and private sources totalled £134,780, including £20,000 for British Red Cross ambulances and £6,000 for the provision of two aeroplanes.

Gifts of 7,600 packages of foodstuffs were sent to wounded soldiers in British hospitals, and £50,000 worth of sugar was presented to the British government. The natives of the Turks and Caicos Islands, administered by Jamaica, gave a motor ambulance to the British army.

[The English pound at present is about \$4—Editor.]

Big sacrifices were also made by Trinidad and Tobago. The Legislative Council voted £40,820 for the purchase of cocoa for the British army and navy; £20,000 as a gift for imperial war purposes; £171,824 for the upkeep of the island's contingent and £1,000 for English charities. A further sum of £65,000 was raised by private subscription, including £416 by the elementary school-children for Belgian children. Over £10,000 was raised by private subscription to pay the passages of middle-class young men to England to join up with white regiments.

Barbados, the most patriotic of all the West Indies, and incidentally, the poorest, lived up to its name of "Little

England." It contributed 2,000 men to the West Indian Regiment, of whom 831 saw service in Palestine and Mesopotamia. (I shall have more to say about the treatment of these blacks later on.) The island's financial contribution was astounding. The sum of £80,000 was given in cash to the British Chancellor of the Exchequer and an extra £30,000 was collected by the people for various British war charities, such as pensions for disabled white soldiers and allowances to their dependents. Barbados also gave £20,000 worth of sugar to the mother country.

Grenada, not to be outdone, sent 445 men and spent £43,635 on the war. Of this sum, £6,000 was for the purchase of cocoa for the troops to keep them warm in winter, and £7,687 on war charities.

St. Lucia's contribution to the armed forces was 359 men, most of whom saw service in the Near East. War loan subscriptions totalled £12,200, and contributions to British charities exceeded £9,000, apart from £2,000 spent on cocoa for the forces.

St. Vincent sent 592 men to the front and made a gift of a thousand pounds' worth of arrowroot for the army and £1,000 cash to the National Relief Fund. In 1917, all cotton produced on the island was purchased by the Colonial Office for the Admiralty, apart from which, 55 tons of maize was presented as a gift to the Ministry of Food. Further, the native workers and peasants raised £2,251 for the "Win the War" Fund.

The Leeward Islands, another poverty-stricken group, supplied four contingents to the West Indian Expeditionary Force. The Governments contributed £22,250 to the Imperial Government's war expenses. Of this £6,000 was given to the National Relief Fund and £4,000 for the purchase of aeroplanes. The Dominica Government also gave £1,000 to the relief of Belgian refugees. The natives raised by private subscription £20,000 to help Britain win the war. All the islands contributed food and raw materials. Dominica, for example, sent England regular shipments of citrus fruits as gifts to hospitals. Antigua supplied sugar.

The South American colony of British Guiana recruited over 700 men for the West Indian Regiment. Four steamers were presented to the British Admiralty for submarine patrol. Two aeroplanes were also given to the Royal Air Force. The country spent about \$500,000 on local defense. The Government gave £5,000 to Lord Kitchener's Memorial Fund, while the sum of \$91,255, including \$2,400 from native school-children was raised for British charities.

British Honduras on the Central American mainland sent 580 men over-



British Combine

These two colored recruits from South Africa are shown at a Royal Air Force training center in Great Britain. Note that in contrast to the United States, these men are included in training along with their white comrades. In the newly-announced plans for training Negro pilots in the U. S. army, Washington has set up a strictly jim crow air squadron

seas, and spent \$342,000 on defense. She gave £10,000 to the British War Fund and contributed \$76,000 to charities. The colony also supplied the mother country with large quantities of mahogany for aeroplane propellers.

The Bahamas supplied 700 men for the army and spent £36,276 on defense. The islands which are now administered by the Duke of Windsor, gave cash gifts to the amount of £10,000 to the War Fund, and £1,016, and sent six

motor ambulances to Britain. Total cash gifts, private and public, amounted to over £60,000.

Bermuda—the playground of rich Americans—also made substantial financial contributions to Great Britain. All in all, the West Indies sent 15,601 officers and men, of whom 1,276 were killed in action and 697 wounded.

Cold Gratitude to Negroes

From the foregoing it will be seen that these colonies played well their part in the defense of Britain and her Empire in the last war. Let us see how, in return, these colored folks were treated.

In the armed forces the Color Bar reigned supreme. It was carried to such a ridiculous degree that the darker skin natives were segregated from the lighter, as goats from sheep. The West Indian army was recruited on strictly racial lines. The darker skin natives were attached to what was known as the "Public Contingent," while the whites and near-whites (octoroons and quadroons) were formed into the "Merchants and Planters Contingent." The former were under the command of Englishmen and local-born white officers, while the other force was transported to England and incorporated into various British regiments. Several of these colonial Brahmins were later granted commissions and transferred to the command of black troops in Egypt and Palestine.

The blatancy of this racial discrimination created extreme resentment among the Negroes, who were debarred by King's Regulation from holding a commission in the army. The military caste is one of the most conservative and exclusive in Britain. Only a full-blooded European may become an "officer and gentleman." This attitude is in striking contrast to that of the French, who had many black officers in their metropolitan and colonial armies.

Officers drawn from the ranks of the colonial plantocracy, being accustomed to exploit and ill-treat Negroes, naturally brought their slave-driver mentality into army life. The arrogance of some of these men—especially the South Africans—became so intolerable that several native soldiers were court-martialed for defending themselves against the chauvinistic behavior of their superiors. Feeling among the Negroes ran so high that the Imperial General Staff decided to disband the West Indian Regiment as soon as war was over and garrison the Caribbean with white troops.

The first World War certainly marked a definite turning point in West Indian ideology. It served to broaden their outlook. Most of the men who served abroad came back more racially and

politically conscious, stimulated no doubt by the Wilsonian slogans of "Democracy and Self-determination" for oppressed peoples and races. It is therefore not surprising that the most militant and articulate post-war leaders among the common people of the islands are ex-service men like Uriah Butler, the Trinidad Labor leader.

As a result of the experiences of the first World War and subsequent events there was not the same outburst of wild enthusiasm for the British cause when the second World War broke out as there was in 1914.

Thus the British imperial authorities, conscious of the anti-imperialist sentiments among the Negroes, particularly since the betrayal of Abyssinia, have made no attempt to extend conscription to the West Indies. Colored men born in the United Kingdom, however, were called to the colors, and here is where the trouble began.

Most of these colored men are what the English call half-caste—sons of white mothers and African or West Indian fathers. Embittered by the way they are treated, many of them refused to join up when summoned. Brought before the military tribunals, they related stories of how some of them had tried to join the Royal Air Force during peace time and were turned down on grounds of color. Had they been exempted, the matter might well have dropped there, but the authorities forced them into the army.

Knowing that these men would be faced with color disabilities, the colonial defense organizations in London—the International African Service Bureau, the League of Coloured Peoples, Negro Welfare Association and West African Students Union, decided to challenge the Color Bar in the armed forces. Meetings were organized and resolutions adopted. Letters were sent to the Press and P.M.'s lobbied in the House of Commons. A representative delegation also called at Downing street and protested to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Similar representation was made to the Air Ministry and War Office.

It seemed a losing fight. In Britain tradition dies hard, especially where race is concerned. For it must not be forgotten that while Britain is undoubtedly the last bastion of democracy in the Old World, the English are the most color-conscious people in Europe. So much so, that in a letter to the "Times" (September 12, 1940), signed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, heads of the Church of England; the Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches; the President of the National Free Church of England and

Wales, and Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, an appeal is made to the British people to remove the barriers of race and color in England's hour of danger. This document is of such historical importance not only for the English people, but the Anglo-Saxon world of Christendom, that I shall quote it in full, with the hope that it will influence the race-baiters in America. The letter reads:

Racial Freedom

"A people committed to a great struggle is led to consider more thoroughly than before the principles on which its own life is based. We recognize that in the Nazi creed of racial domination we are confronted with an evil doctrine that could only bring misery and injustice in its train. In repudiating it, we are following our own tradition; but it may be that we have not fully realized the quality of that tradition or what is involved by complete fidelity to it.

"Our tradition has, on several recent occasions, received authoritative statement. Thus, to give but one example, in the *Statement of Policy on Colonial Development and Welfare* issued in February, 1940, the following declarations occur:

"His Majesty's Government are trustees for the well-being of the peoples of the Colonial Empire.

"The primary aim of Colonial policy is to protect and advance the interests of the inhabitants of the Colonies."

"The whole effort will be one of collaboration between the authorities in the Colonies and those at home; there must be ready recognition . . . that Colonial Governments, who best know the needs of their own territories, should enjoy a wide latitude in the initiation and execution of policies, the primary purpose of which is to promote the prosperity and happiness of the peoples of the Colonial Empire." (Cmd. 6175, paras. 3 and 16.)

"The serious purpose of His Majesty's Government is proved by the decision to spend fifty-five million pounds to improve the health, education and economic condition of colonial peoples.

"But the full value of this generous gesture will be realized only if the worth of the individual members of the Empire comes to be measured by personal character and ability rather than by the color of their skins or the accidental circumstances of birth.

"The tradition to which expression is given in the official declarations cited above is, in fact, the Christian tradition, and the prejudice which erects a Color Bar or prompts racial exclusiveness is, in fact, a denial of Christian principles. Fundamental to any Christian view is

the conviction that God is the Father of all men, and that Christ died for all. In the Christian fellowship all racial barriers are done away—'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' And this principle has necessary application not only to the life of the Church itself, but to the whole ordering of life so far as that aspires to be Christian.

"To the British Empire, which has increasingly affirmed this principle in official utterances, these considerations are of vital importance. It is not sufficiently understood by British people how largely the British Empire is a colored Empire; the unity necessary to its survival in the long run can be secured only if the principle of equality as between people of different race and color is applied in methods of Government and in human relationships alike in Europe and in Asia or Africa.

"We therefore claim the help of all who value the principles on which our Empire has been built up:

"1. In a concentrated effort to remove the barriers of race and color which exist today in British Colonies. The Royal Commission to the West Indies has just made the same appeal (Cmd. 6174, 30a) in these words:

'That the active assistance of all persons of standing, and of all available means of publicity, such as broadcasting, should be enlisted in an organized attempt to prevent any further extension of color prejudice.'

To this end the greatest care needs to be exercised in the selection of those who go to the Colonies as our representatives, either in an administrative or commercial capacity, and in their preparation for the peculiar problems they will encounter.

"2. In creating in this country an informed public opinion which will no longer tolerate passive acquiescence in the application of the color bar in such practices as the following:

(a) The practice of many hotel managements which still ask decent professional men and other colored visitors to take their meals in their bed-sitting rooms and not to use the public lounges. In doing so, the management consider that they are interpreting the wishes of their English clients.

(b) The refusal of certain hospitals to admit girls of distinctive color for training as probationer nurses or to give House Appointments to well qualified colored applicants.

(c) The reluctance of works managers to engage colored workmen and of many British laborers to work side by side with them.

"3. In extending the hospitality of English homes to colored people in this



British Combine

This is one of the Indian pilots being trained in the R.A.F. in the north of England. If he were in the United States he would have trouble in Georgia

country, and in furthering by all available means the mutual understanding which will produce an educational and social program for the Colonial peoples, calculated to remove the sense of inferiority and of unreasonable discrimination.

"In this day of testing, when fundamental issues are made evident, let us be whole-hearted in loyalty to the best elements of our own tradition; and as we fight to preserve it and the instructions which embody it from the destruction which is threatened by an enemy pledged to a doctrine of race-superiority and race-domination, let us rise to the full height of our calling as champions of human freedom and brotherhood."

French Collapse Changed Situation

While the campaign against the Color Bar was developing momentum, France suddenly collapsed and England was faced with the imminent danger of invasion. Overnight the centuries-old military caste edifice based upon color came tumbling down like Humpty-

Dumpty. Let us hope that all the king's horses and all the king's men will fail to resurrect this foul system.

Deserted by their Continental friends and allies, the British ruling classes were now forced to appeal to the colonial peoples to help save them from their former friend, Herr Hitler. Ironically enough, Jamaica, where not more than three natives can now assemble together or even walk through the streets of Kingston with a stick, was the first colony to start a Spitfire Fund. The island subscribed a squadron of 12 fighter planes. Other colonies followed, and by November the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies was able to announce in Parliament that over £17,000,000 had been collected for planes and other forms of assistance to Britain.

Besides this magnificent gesture, the Strait Settlements and Malaya States contributed over twenty million pounds for the defense of Singapore. Commenting upon these gifts, Mr. Michael Foot, writing in the *Evening Standard*, the paper of Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Aircraft Production, has the following to say:

"These bombers and fighters will bear the names, perhaps the coat of arms, of a hundred cities in scores of lands in half-a-dozen continents. A bomber and three fighters from British Guiana; two Hurricanes from the Bahamas; three hundred Spitfires from Ceylon; fifty Spitfires from the Gold Coast; seventy-five more from Hyderabad; eighty more from East India; twelve bombers from Malaya; a bomber and two Spitfires from Mauritius; two Spitfires from Mombasa; £100,000 from New Zealand to be spent at Lord Beaverbrook's discretion; ten Spitfires from Sarawak (and one from the Rajah); three bombers from Trinidad, one Spitfire from St. Vincent and another from Grenda in the Windward Isles; four Spitfires from Zanzibar, more fighters and bombers from Uganda; more again from Rhodesia and a promise of regular monthly supplies; more again still from Southern Rhodesia; Spitfires yet again from the 'Speed the Planes' fund in Natal; large consignments of rupees from Madras; fighters and bombers, bombers and fighters, most of all squadrons of Spitfires; every day contributions and pledges of future contributions are pouring into the Minister's office.

"Jamaica had the idea first and had already increased her first contribution by three fighters. All the Empire followed her example."

Indian princes have also made substantial gifts. The Maharajah of Nysore cabled Lord Beaverbrook £45,000. One of the fighter squadrons defending London at this very moment of writing is supported by the Nizam of Hyderabad,

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British Color Bar

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reputed to be the richest man in the world. He recently sent the Royal Air Force a cheque for £100,000. In the German mass attacks last autumn the Nizam's squadron played a prominent part. During the last three months alone it has shot down 36 Nazi planes, but 10 "probables," and damaged 25.

The Hyderabad squadron perfectly symbolizes the allied struggle against Nazi domination. It is financially supported by an Indian ruler and includes among its flying personnel two Poles, two Czechs and a New Zealander, a French supporter of General de Gaulle, and a white Rhodesian (natives are not allowed to bear arms in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa). In recognition of the squadron's services, the Air Ministry is now designing a special crest to be painted on the Hyderabad machines.

However, it was not until June 28, eleven days after the French capitulation that the Air Ministry informed the League of Coloured Peoples that the Imperial Air Council had decided "that for the period of the war, British subjects from the Colonies who are in this country, including those not wholly of European descent, are to be on the same footing as British subjects from the United Kingdom as regards eligibility for voluntary enlistment in the Armed Forces, including the Royal Air Force.

"British subjects of non-European descent who are in this country are considered on their merits for service with the Royal Air Force, and several have been accepted since the outbreak of war. . . . A careful examination of overseas man-power resources has been recently made, and that machinery is being set up in certain overseas countries for the local selection and entry of suitable personnel."

The first African to be selected for training as a pilot was Mr. Babatunde O. Alakija, son of the Hon. A. Alakija, a member of the Legislative Council of Nigeria and a nephew of the Alake of Abeokuta, a leading West African chief. Young Alakija was educated at Oxford and held the British Public School High Jump Championship. Arundel Moody, son of Dr. Moody, President of the League of Coloured Peoples, has also been admitted into an Officers' Training Corps, and Miss Moody, who is a physician, has joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. Dr. Otto Wallen, the son of a former mayor of Trinidad, and Dr. A. Marsh of Jamaica have also been granted commissions as lieutenants in the R.A.M.C. Larry Gains, the colored Canadian, former British Empire heavy-

weight champion, is a Sergeant instructor.

Several Indians have arrived in England to join the R.A.F. These men, however, are not nationalist camp-followers of Gandhi and Nehru, but the sons of officials, wealthy industrialists, landlords and money-lenders, loyal supporters of the British Raj. As most of them already hold pilot certificates, they hope to be soon able to take part in bombing raids over Germany. They were recently the guests of the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace. A very significant gesture.

Air Training Schemes

But these volunteers are not enough to meet the rapidly expanding needs of the R.A.F. The Imperial Government have therefore shipped training aircraft to India to be distributed to flying clubs in connection with the Viceroy's scheme for the training of a reserve of colored pilots locally.

A similar scheme has been started in Malaya, Ceylon and other colonies. The Colonial Office has made arrangements for the establishment in the various West Indian islands, as well as in Bermuda, British Guiana and British Honduras, of local selection and medical boards to select candidates for service in the R.A.F. as pilots, observers, wireless operators and air gunners. The names of candidates selected by these boards are communicated to the Air Ministry and, subject to their approval, the candidates are provided with their passages either to England or Canada for training.

The results so far have not been encouraging. In Trinidad, for example, the Governor, Sir Hubert Young, himself a qualified pilot, appealed for 350 volunteers. Only 85 responded, and of this number only 12 made the grade. It is necessary to examine the reason for this poor showing, for it has a significant bearing upon the general colonial policy of British imperialism.

Modern wars are becoming more and more mechanized. This in turn calls for a high degree of technical knowledge, especially for the air force. In Britain, the minimum educational qualifications demanded for candidates is the Oxford and Cambridge School Certificate, the equivalent of university matriculation in America. Now apply this standard to the Colonies.

Having neglected the educational and cultural development of her subject races, only a very small percentage of natives in the British colonies have had the advantage of a secondary, much less university, training. This intellectual élite constitute the professional classes or employees engaged in essential public work, and who therefore cannot be re-

lieved for military service abroad without causing a great dislocation in the economic and administrative life of their respective countries. For the majority of English officials in the Colonies are just figureheads. The Empire has always been a sort of outdoor relief for the sons of the British aristocracy—and may we add, royalty?

On the other hand, those natives who can be spared, such as the unemployed and semi-employed, lack even the most rudimentary education. Even apart from this, very few of them could pass the medical examination, as a result of years of malnutrition.

As an example, let us take India, with her teeming population of over 350 millions. After a century and a half of British rule, "only ten persons out of a hundred can read or write, and out of this ten above 2.5 per cent, are literate in English," declares Dr. K. S. Shelvankar in his book *The Problem of India*, of which, by the way, the censor has refused permission for copies to be sent to America. Dealing with the standard of living, the author says: "Exact statistics for the whole country are not available, but a preliminary survey shows that 20 per cent of the people are 'very badly nourished' and 41 per cent are 'poorly nourished'; only 39 per cent can be regarded as well nourished. To put it bluntly, at least two-thirds of the people are starved." (p. 61).

The same conditions prevail in the African colonies. Britain is today paying a terrible price for neglecting the well-being of her colonial wards. But how could it be otherwise? Imperialism, like Nazism, is a system that cannot afford to educate its victims. Political oppression and economic exploitation can only thrive on the ignorance of its victims. Thus poverty and illiteracy constitute the very foundation stone of modern empires.

The war has exposed the rotteness in the Colonial System. Instead of being able to recruit thousands of first-class pilots from India and the Colonies, as is being done in Canada, Australia, and other white Dominions, the military authorities are experiencing the greatest difficulties in getting a few hundred recruits.

In India, the problem is made more difficult by the fact that the vast majority of young intellectuals—the failed B.A.'s—are staunch supporters of Mahatma Gandhi, and have no use for the British.

It is one of the greatest ironies of history that, thanks to the notorious race-baiter, Adolf Hitler, England, the greatest upholder of racial segregation among colonial powers, has been forced to discard the Color Bar in the Royal Air Force, in order to save herself.