

At the Historic Communist Convention

Reported on Reconversion

LILA MAE THOMAS, NEGRO SHIPYARD WORKER, SHOWS THE WAY

By JOHN MELDON

It was a distinct pleasure and an experience to talk to delegate Lila Mae Thomas, who came to the Communist organizational convention in New York from Wilmington, Del.

To my way of thinking this charming Negro woman should get a medal or something if the Communist Political Association ever gets around to such formalities. Here's why. Lila Thomas joined the Communist movement two months ago and up until the time I met her, sitting intently, listening to the convention proceedings Lila had recruited 69 new members into the CPA. And I believe that this constitutes a record of that total, she brought in 50 new members from her shipyard fellow workers and from the great Sun Shipbuilding yards 14 miles north in the roaring industrial town of Chester, Pa.

She told me her greatest asset in recruiting was the pamphlet, "The Negro People and the Communists," by Doxey Wilkerson, noted Negro educator and Daily Worker columnist. "Another big help," she said, "was that I was able to truthfully

say that there is absolutely no discrimination within the ranks of the Communists. That means an awful lot to the average Negro."

JUST BEGINNING

Lila Thomas remarked casually, as we ended the interview;

"I'm not stopping recruiting just because the drive is over. I'm only beginning. I believe that the majority of the Negro people in this country are ready to come into our ranks. It's simply a matter of talking to them."

A striking feature of this historic gathering is the unusually large number of Negro delegates, especially among the delegations from the large industrial areas—Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Ohio. And in talking to the various delegation leaders, I learned that invariably the ace recruiters in the big delegations were Negroes. Two Negroes in the Michigan delegation, one a Ford employee and the other a Bohn Aluminum worker recruited between them, 146 members. That's terrific. And what makes it more terrific is that they did most of the recruiting among their fellow auto and alumni

workers.

Or take L. C. Fox from Chicago. Delegate Fox is a small businessman. He's comparatively new—only in the Communist movement two years. He won 55 new members, significantly enough the majority among Negro professionals—doctors, lawyers and small business people.

Of course, the whole CPA knows by now that the top-flight recruiter in New York is Mrs. Katie Thompson who did most of her recruiting in Harlem. Her total, to date, is 121 new members.

One could not find a Negro delegate one the whole convention floor who brought into the Communist ranks less than 10 new members. Many joined during the recent national drive and promptly brought a dozen or so of their friends in with them.

This is a significant trend among the Negro people as a whole. I talked with Communist leader James W. Ford and he said there can be no doubt that the Negro masses in this country are ripe for activity in the ranks of the Communist Political Association. "The work of our ace

Negro recruiters in New York, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the Deep South is ample proof."

And it's not only the new Negro Communists who are doing this splendid work. One can find similar stories among the old timers, like Ben Carruthers, a leader of the Western Pennsylvania OPA. Ben had recruited 44 new members up until the time he left the smoky atmosphere of that great steel center to journey as a delegate to the convention. Sally Peek, a cafeteria worker in Jimcrow Washington brought in a modest 10 new members, and she's still plugging. Herb Hall, a Baltimore shipyard worker got 11 of his fellow-workers to join up and he's still plugging.

Of the 402 regular and fraternal delegates to the convention, 64 are Negroes. And many of them are key leaders in their unions and in the CPA. From among the total of 24,000 new members recruited in the national drive, nearly 8,000 are Negro industrial workers, white collar employes, professionals, housewives with a sprinkling of educators and clergymen.

These facts, are one of the truly inspiring features of the convention.