

THE LSNR IN TI



Peonage, debt slavery, persecution is lot of hundred

by TOM JOHNSON

A Negro cropper in the Alabama Black Belt told me this story recently.

"I made a real good crop in '29", he said, "About 3 bales all told I guess, and I wanted to pay off my store bill with the supply merchant. One day in the early fall I loaded one bale on the wagon and started to town. I pulled up in front of the store and the merchant was standing on the steps.

"I come in to pay up my store debt Mr. Henry", I told him.

"All right Jim", he replied, "Come on in and I'll figure it up."

"As we went into the store he asked me, 'Is that one bale all you got nigger'?"

"I thought he meant was that one bale all I had with me and I replied that it was. We went in and he started to figure. At the end of a half hour or so he turned to me and said; 'Well I've got it all figured out Jim, and it comes to just one bale, so you

can just unload that bale and set it there in the shed'.

"I did as he told me, overjoyed that my store debt was paid and I still had two bales of cotton left. As I started home he asked me, 'You sure that one bale is all you made nigger'?"

"Why no. I replied, I made 3 bales this year but this one bale was all I brought over here with me! He said nothing more and I drove off home.

Made "Mistake"

"Two days latter the merchant came over to my cabin and called me out. 'Look here nigger, he said, I just found I made a big mistake when I figured your debt and you owe me a bale and a half more.'

"I knew he lied but what could I do? I had foolishly let him know I made three bales and I had to give it to him. If I refused he would send the sheriff after me or shoot me down himself and what chance has a colored man in the white boss mens court? I gave him the extra bale and a half and he drove off. He had stripped me

THE BLACK BELT



d of thousands of Share Croppers in the South.

bare. A month latter I had to go to him and go farther into debt to carry over the next crop. Thats the way it goes down here."

This story is typical of conditions in the strip of ten counties in southern Alabama that make up the Black Belt. The Negro croppers who make up 80% of all farmers in this area, live under conditions of virtual slavery, ruled over by a small group of white landlords and supply merchants. Even those few Negroes who own their own little farms are in the clutches of the supply merchants and work their lives away in a hopeless struggle to get out of debt.

Master's Word Law

The cropper owns nothing but his labor power. He works with the tools and stock furnished him by his landlord. He is supposed in most cases to share equally with the landlord in the division of the crop. In actual fact this is never the case. Formal written contracts are almost unknown. A verbal agreement is the rule and in a dispute over a contract-should any

cropper have the courage to dispute with a landlord-the white landlords with a landlord-the white landlords. Thousands of Negro croppers work year in and year out with no formal settlement ever being made. Frequently the cropper does not even receive a receipt for his cotton in the fall drive when the landlord takes it. He simply turns over his entire crop to the landlord and the latter gives him whatever he sees fit. In every sense the white masters' word is law.

It is in this territory, where oppression is sharpest, where the position of the overwhelming majority of the population is that of semi-slaves without even the most elementary social and political rights, where the bourgeois democratic revolution has yet to be carried thru, that the League of Struggle For Negro Rights must speedily sink its roots, and establish itself as a fearless leader of the struggle of the Negro nation, for full equality including the right of national self-determination.