

A WORD AS TO UNCLE TOM (1934)

Michael Gold

Short Biography:

Michael Gold was born in New York City in 1894. His parents were Jewish immigrants and originally had the name Itzok Isaac Granich. He developed radical political views and began contributing to socialist journals such as the *Masses* and the *Call*. Gold was strong opponent of the United States becoming involved in the First World War. When the USA entered the war in 1917 Gold moved to Mexico to evade the draft. Gold returned to New York City in 1920 and became associate editor of *The Liberator*. Six years later Gold and his friend, John Sloan, became joint editors of the *New Masses*. Books written by Gold include, *120 Million* (1929), *Jews Without Money* (1930) and *Change the World* (1937). Michael Gold died in 1967.

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ONE of the midnight fears of the American Tory-Babbitt today is that the Negroes are becoming Communist-minded. The color of this Tory-Babbitt is white. It is also black, brown, yellow and gold. The bourgeoisie of both races is uniting on a singular program in which the proletariat of both races is kept under the iron heel.

Three months ago the Communists organised a demonstration in the Negro South Side of Chicago. A poor Negro woman with a sick husband and children was to be evicted. Her furniture was on the street. She was in the street with her poverty. The Communists put her furniture back and defied the landlord. The police came and fired into the crowd, and killed three Negro Communists. Later, it was discovered that the police had been called into such evictions, and egged on to violent action by a committee of Negro landlords, the spokesman and strategist of which was a Negro attorney who is also the Chicago leader of the N.A.A.C.P.

Thus is the class war revealed in a flash of lightning and murder. It cuts across all the race lines. It is more important than the race conflict. It is the CAUSE of the race conflict. The mass of the Negro race in America is peasant and proletarian. Hitherto the small fringe of Negro artists, intellectuals and business men has been chiefly concerned with climbing into the white bourgeois world. Who of the Negro leaders has ever given thought to the life-problems of the Negro mass? Who of them has spoken for the rent-croppers, shoeblacks, waiters, Pullman porters, masseurs, ditch-diggers, steel workers, North and South, the eleven million black toilers who are the RACE?

The fate of a few artists or business men is not the fate of a race. I, as a Jew, know that. We have had centuries of Jewish millionaires, and poets like Heine, and thinkers like Einstein. But a Jew in Poland today is no better off than a Negro in Alabama. In the old Czarist Russia there were wealthy Jews, pious Jews, respectable, bourgeois Jews, but the Jewish mass was lynched, massacred, segregated, insulted like the American Negroes. The Czar's bloody government sustained its power by playing off the races against each other, exactly like the English in India today, who play Mohammedan against Hindu. When there was a famine, when taxes were high, when the peasants were ready to rise in revolt, the Czar's spies went whispering that the Jews were to blame, and Jewish blood was poured out in a pogrom.

In America, the chief cause of anti-Negro feeling is not skin, race, exotic strangeness, social prejudice, but these

same economics of a master class. Read Civil War history. Andrew Johnson was a native of Tennessee, but fought on the Northern side of the Civil War. He came from poor farmer stock, and hated the rich slave-owning landlords, who despised the poor whites as much as they did the Negroes. After Andrew Johnson became President, this same early class hatred moved him against the feudalists. He said the "poor whites" had been forced into the war against their will; they did not want slavery, it degraded all labor, white and black. The Civil War freed the Negro from chattel slavery, and thrust him into wage slavery. The Negro's problem now is to free himself from this wage slavery, the same problem, exactly, as the white worker's, no different. But he can never be free until there is a social revolution. This is a hard saying, but let us not avoid reality.

The Negro business men and intellectuals have made their own revolution and won it. They have money and success, and they are willing to let the world remain as it is. When they say Freedom, they mean themselves. But the Negro MASS is still enchained in steel mills and on cotton plantations, and every move it makes towards freedom is met with guns, rope and faggot. But the white worker meets the same treatment. Negro landlords shoot down Negro tenants, with the aid of white police. White bosses shoot down white workers. Jewish bosses in the New York garment strike kill and maim Jewish workers by the aid of Italian gangsters and Irish cops. There is no RACE in the class war.

In the last three years a great drift among thoughtful Negro workers and farmers has set in towards the Communist theory. These Negroes understand there is no hope in the bourgeois Uncle Toms who want everything to stand still, or to be done by lawyer-like diplomacy. Into the Communist movement the Negro comes not as a suppliant, or a tolerated ally, but with demands. It is the one movement in the world where he can DEMAND social equality, economic equality, intermarriage, anything that is his. He can and does bring white Communists to trial in Communist tribunals if they show any race prejudice. There have been a number of such cases, and the criminals have been expelled from the Party.

In the South the bosses keep the races divided. In strikes Negroes have been used as scabs, with the approval of such leaders as Kelly Miller. No one ever dared to organise the Negroes for their rights in the South; no one ever dared to preach Negro equality to the white workers in the South, until the Communists penetrated there. The strike at Gastonia a few years ago was the first battle. The Communists went into a community of pure-bred mountain whites, and told them boldly they could not have a textile union without giving the Negroes full rights. I know some of the organisers who were first in this field. They knew they carried their lives in their hands; they knew they were risking everything, including the possibility that the white workers would hate Communism forever. But they preached the Communist doctrine that the workers of every race can only free themselves by uniting with the workers of every other race. And they won. The miracle happened. The white workers understood. The Negro was given his full standing in the union. The same thing has happened in fifty other places in the South since. It is becoming a national force.

The Communists are teaching that there cannot be a strong and successful labor movement in America unless the 11,000,000 Negro workers are included. Outside, they are a dangerous reservoir for scabs and lower wages. Inside, they are the last guaranty of final victory. And the white workers are beginning to understand this Communist doctrine. There is more being done in these past five years to break down anti-Negro prejudice in the South than has been done in fifty years of Uncle Tom cringing, concert hall singing of spirituals, literary articles, and other bourgeois methods. It is a bitter and bloody progress, of course. But when has a race gotten anywhere except by sacrifice? Yes, the Communists call the Negro forth to new sacrifices, but they can assure him of some great victories, and a great goal at the end. It is better to be a man and die for a great cause than to flee like a rabbit before the lynchers.

In Russia, the old Jews, and the bourgeois Jews, had an Uncle Tom policy also. It is amazing to see how the history of the two races parallels at so many points. These old, pious, legal, Jewish Uncle Toms would deliver young Jewish revolutionists to the Czar's police. Young Jewish revolutionists would be brought in chains by the police to a synagogue and the Rabbi would preach against them and warn all other youth. The same thing in America. The landlords, intellectuals and other bourgeois Negroes have commenced a fierce drive against the Communist influence. It does not make them indignant against the murderous bosses when Negro workers are

shot down in a strike. They are indignant against the Communists who prevailed upon the Negroes to strike. These Judases run like stool-pigeons to the authorities and expose Negro Communists. In print and from the platform they preach the extermination of Communists, exactly like all the Czars and reactionaries.

A terrible scandal was created by them in the recent case of the Negro boys on trial for their lives in Alabama (Scottsboro). Because the Communists first took up the defence of these boys and, with passion and courage, made of it an international issue like the Sacco-Vanzetti case, these Uncle Toms were indignant. They wanted the case conducted quietly, respectably; they wanted a polite, well-mannered lynching. But the Communists believe in widespread publicity; they believe in accusing the upper-class criminals to the whole world. Can you have a fair trial for Negroes in Alabama? Especially when the defence was half-hearted and conceded guilt where there was no guilt? Can you have a fair trial for Dreyfus or Sacco-Vanzetti without a world-wide publicity?

The Uncle Toms have no program to offer the Negro masses. They are NOT organising the starving rent-croppers or steel workers. They are NOT going into the hell-holes of the South and preaching Negro equality to the white workers. Their platform is the bourgeois one of let the unemployed man starve quietly to death, let the Negro suffer quietly, begging only for a few crumbs of justice.

But the workers of the world are rising. We are living in the century of beginnings. No one can stop this flood. In China, in India, in Japan, yes, and in Africa, on the continent of Europe, in the Malay seas, in the Siberian tundras, in the Egyptian deltas, south to Cape Horn, north to Nome, Alaska, the movement spreads, and the American Negro worker has at last taken his proud and fearless place in the world ranks. And these Uncle Toms think they will stop it. They will do much damage; they will help betray many a strike, and help, by their frenzied denunciations, many a lynching and massacre, but they can never keep the Negro worker from his manhood.
