

# The Smith-Lever Bill and Other Work

of the

## National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

**A** GAIN the association finds itself on the firing line in Washington. First came the segregation matter and now the Smith-Lever bill, which provides for co-operative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several States and the United States Department of Agriculture.

The Smith bill, introduced into the Senate by Hoke Smith of Georgia, and identical with the Lever bill, introduced into the House by Asbury F. Lever of South Carolina, proposes to appropriate the total sum of \$15,120,000 during the next ten years and thereafter the sum of \$3,000,000 a year for this agricultural extension work.

Since the bills make no mention of race whatever, they are apparently fair. Only experts and those very familiar with the history of the color line would grasp the sinister significance of the provision which allows the legislatures of the States to name the college or colleges which are to administer these funds. In all the Southern States, except Tennessee, there are separate agricultural colleges for the education of white and colored students. This provision would enable the legislature of any State to give the entire appropriation for that State to the white colleges.

The bill was first called to our attention by our legislative expert in Washington. Mr. Brinsmade, the attorney for the association, immediately went to Washington. Before he reached there, however, the bill had been rushed through the House. This was a sudden move and made our work more difficult. Mr. Brinsmade succeeded in interesting a number of Senators. He drafted an amendment to safeguard the interests of the colored farmers which, at our suggestion, was introduced by Senator Jones of Washington. To meet the requests for fuller information on the subject, Mr.

Brinsmade and Dr. Du Bois compiled a memorandum in support of the amendment. Copies of this may be secured at headquarters for 15 cents each so long as the supply lasts.

To quote from the memorandum: "The proposed amendment is calculated to insure to the colored farmers of the South a share in the benefits to be derived from the money appropriated under the act. As the bill reads without the amendment, the colored farmers may not receive any of the benefits in these appropriations. Certainly they will not receive their fair share." The memorandum then shows by detailed statistics that when the interests of colored farmers have not been expressly safeguarded they have received only a small proportion of their proper share of funds appropriated for agricultural extension.

To quote again from the memorandum: "The colored farmer is the last man who should be deprived of the benefits of the proposed act.

"A.—If his interests alone are considered, this is obviously so. With his poorer opportunity for acquiring an education, he is at a distinct disadvantage in his effort to compete with his white neighbor. The reports show, however, that he has done remarkably well. A slightly larger proportion of the colored than of the white rural population attended at agricultural colleges. It is those who cannot go to the colleges that the act is primarily intended to benefit. Consequently the colored farmers need those appropriations at least as badly as the white.

"B.—If the interests of the whole South are considered, we arrive at the same results. It is for the interests of the South that as much as possible be made of its vast agricultural resources, which are at the present time so insufficiently developed. A

large proportion of the farms in the South are operated by Negroes, either as owners, part owners, managers, share tenants or cash tenants. The total value of farm property operated by Negroes was \$1,116,641,576, as compared with \$7,855,485,313, the total value of white farm property. (See 1910 census.) It cannot seriously be urged that it is for the advantage of the South that the benefits to be derived from this bill shall not be shared by a race which operates \$1,116,641,576 worth of farm property."

When the bill was debated, Senator Vardaman was leader of the fight against the amendment on the ground that the colored people themselves wish the money to which they are entitled distributed by the white colleges. Not only have the Senators had the advantage of the facts contained in our memorandum, but they have been interviewed personally by Mr. Brinsmade, Dr. Du Bois and others, so that they did not have the excuse offered by some of the Representatives, who voted for the bill and then said that they did not realize what they were doing. The whole matter was thoroughly thrashed out in the Senate committee on agriculture and forestry, which reported the Smith bill without amendment, and, as one of the members of this committee admitted, it was thoroughly understood that the bill without amendment did not secure to the colored colleges their fair share of the proposed appropriations.

Just before the Jones amendment was voted on, Senator Shafroth offered a substitute which placed the decision as to what colleges should distribute the funds jointly in the hands of the governor of the State and the Secretary of Agriculture, instead of in the hands of the State legislature. Senator Jones objected that this was not a proper substitute, but was rather an amendment to perfect the bill. As such it was voted on and adopted. There is no doubt that the Southern Senators were forced to offer this amendment by the two days' fight in the Senate on the Jones amendment.

This amendment is not as fair as the Jones amendment, but an important point is gained in that the Federal Government is given equal power with the States in deciding what colleges shall administer the funds.

The Jones amendment was then voted on and defeated by a vote of 32 to 23. The

vote would certainly have been much closer had the Shafroth amendment not been previously adopted. Certain Senators who had announced their intention to vote for the Jones amendment eventually voted against it.

An amendment proposed by Senator Hitchcock, requiring that in the demonstration work itself there shall be no race discrimination, was then adopted without roll call.

If the House does not concur in the Shafroth and Hitchcock amendments the bill will go to conference. The South does not wish a second fight on the race question, and therefore we have every reason to believe that the Shafroth amendment will be incorporated in the bill as finally passed.

As usual the association is having difficulty in getting publicity for this important measure. Special letters and a "story" prepared by a trained newspaper man have been sent to a large number of papers and an effort has been made to reach the correspondents of the big dailies in Washington. Other organizations and friends of our association are trying to help.

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, whose president is Mr. Henry W. Wilbur, our good friend, and whose secretary is Mr. Ellwood Heacock, also president of our Philadelphia branch, is circulating an "appeal for justice," which it has sent to members of Congress and to others. This society is also attempting to get publicity in the press. Its appeal shows clearly how the Smith-Lever bill, without the Jones amendment, violates the amendment to the Morrill act, which safeguarded the colored colleges. In commenting further upon the clause in the Smith-Lever bill, which permits the legislature of any State to designate the white college as the distributor of the national fund for education, the appeal says: "We feel that no such temptation in the nature of an opportunity should be placed in the way of any white college in our country."



#### MEETINGS.

THE association has held a number of successful meetings in addition to those mentioned under branches. Lack of space prevented our noting these in the last issue of THE CRISIS.

In Schenectady Mr. Villard addressed a large and appreciative audience at Union

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