

ROBERT C. REINDERS

RACIALISM ON THE LEFT
E.D. MOREL AND THE
“BLACK HORROR ON THE RHINE”

I

On April 6, 1920 the French government, in reprisal for the entry of German troops into the demilitarized zone of the Ruhr, occupied Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Hanau, and Homburg. During the occupation French Moroccan soldiers fired on a German mob in Frankfurt and killed several.¹ In covering the event the *Daily Herald*, alone among English newspapers, called special attention to the “race” of the French troops. It headlined:

FRANKFURT RUNS WITH BLOOD
FRENCH BLACK TROOPS USE
MACHINE GUNS ON CIVILIANS²

On April 10, the *Herald* followed its accounts of events on the Rhine by a front page article by Edmund Dene Morel under banner leads:

BLACK SCOURGE IN EUROPE
SEXUAL HORROR LET LOOSE BY FRANCE ON RHINE
DISAPPEARANCE OF YOUNG GERMAN GIRLS

France¹, Morel wrote, “is thrusting her black savages ... into the heart of Germany.” There “primitive African barbarians”, carriers of syphilis, have become a “terror and a horror” to the Palatinate countryside. The “barely restrainable bestiality of the black troops” has led to many rapes, an especially serious problem since Africans are “the most developed sexually of any” race and “for well-known physiological reasons, the raping of a white woman by a negro is nearly always accompanied by serious injury and not infrequently has fatal results...” Morel had reports of rapes, “some of them of an atrocious character”, and of “dead bodies of young women discovered under manure heaps and so on”. German municipalities were forced to provide bordellos

¹ Times, April 7-10, 1920; Illustrated London News, CLVI (April 17, 1921), p. 641; Cecil Gosling to Earl Curzon, April 17, 1920, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939 (Rohan Butler and J. P. T. Bury, eds; 1st series; London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), IX, p. 322.

² Daily Herald, April 9, 1920.

and white women, and even young boys, for these over-sexed blacks. Master-minding this effort to “ruin, enslave, degrade, dismember [and] reduce to the lowest depths of despair and humiliation a whole people” was a “ruthless” and militaristic French government. Furthermore Morel warned his working class readers, “If the manhood of these races, not so advanced in the forms of civilisation as ourselves, are to be used against the Germans, *why not against the workers here or elsewhere?*”¹

The *Herald* fully supported the view presented in Morel’s article. The editor in a preface and in an editorial hoped that his female readers would ponder over these “sexual outrages”. Not of course that Negroes were inferior or that the *Herald* was guilty of race prejudice – “we champion the rights of the African native in his own home” – but the facts are that “nature has given us all qualities of temperament suitable to the conditions and climate in which we are born”. The women folk of Albion need be told no more.

If this article had been written by an American racist and had appeared in a Klan journal it might have little intrinsic historical interest. But the *Herald* was the leading left-wing daily in Britain, “at the height of its power”;² and the editor, George Lansbury, was a figure of national importance. Morel as editor of *African Mail*, as a tireless pamphleteer, and as founder of the Congo Reform Association had for many years pleaded the cause of exploited African natives; he, more than any other individual, was responsible for terminating King Leopold’s infamous regime in the Congo. He was a man, one of his co-workers stated, who had “agonies of sympathy with his beloved black man . . .”³ Morel’s liberal credentials were unimpeachable. He opposed Britain’s entry into the war and spent six months in prison for his beliefs. He was a founder of the Union of Democratic Control, its first Secretary, and editor of its journal *Foreign Affairs*. His UDC associates were prominent figures like Charles P. Trevelyan, Charles Roden Buxton, Bertrand Russell, Norman Angell, James Ramsey MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Arthur Ponsonby, Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, Israel Zangwell, Frederick W. Jowett, William C. Anderson, John Atkinson Hobson, Henry Noel Brailsford, Arthur Henderson, and Clement Attlee. The UDC formed an interlocking directorate with

¹ Italics in original.

² Raymond Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (London: Longmans Green, 1951), pp. 195-198, 209.

³ H. M. Swanwick, *Builders of the Peace: Being Ten Years’ History of the Union of Democratic Control* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1924), p. 187. See also A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: New Leader, 1942), p. 54.

the Independent Labour Party and therefore had close connections with the left-wing of the Labour Party.¹

Morel, in common with many liberals, had pinned his hopes on Woodrow Wilson's ability to transcribe his Fourteen Points into the basis of a just peace. The result in Morel's estimation was a travesty; the Treaty of Versailles was vindictive, historically unjustified, economic suicide, and a tool for French militarism and English imperialism.² Even the mandate system, which Morel initially favoured, proved to be no more than a cover for imperial greed.³

Morel's fears about Africa in the post war world, a partial explanation for his *Herald* article, were chronicled in an angry and bitter book, *The Black Man's Burden*, written late in 1919.⁴ The African, Morel argued, is a child of the tropics and is not equipped like the European peasant to survive "modern capitalist exploitation".⁵ Militarism, the hand-maiden of imperialist capitalism, had made its entry into Africa during the war. The French had conscripted blacks, had trained them to use modern weapons, and sent them to kill whites and eventually garrison European towns where inevitably these "primitive Africans" have "raped white women" (p. 223). French militarists, "whose schemes are a menace to the world" will use these "Negroes, Malagasies, Berbers [and] Arabs . . . in the interest of a capitalist and militant Order" (p. 223). The only solution would be to

¹ Swanwick, *Builders of the Peace*, pp. 34-35; "Six Years", in: *Foreign Affairs: A Journal of International Understanding*, II (December, 1920), p. 94; Norman Angell, *After All* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), pp. 191, 193. For a detailed biography of Morel see R. Wuliger, "The Idea of Economic Imperialism, with Special Reference to the Life and Work of E. D. Morel" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1953).

² Morel, "The Will to Destroy Germany", in: *Labour Leader*, December 11, 1919; Editor's preface to Philips Price, "British Labour's Duty in Central Europe", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (July, 1920), p. 7; Morel, "The Destructive Legend", *ibid.*, II (April, 1921), pp. 149-150; "Our Purpose", *ibid.*, I (July, 1919), p. 1; Wuliger, "The Idea of Economic Imperialism", pp. 370-371, 406-408. The UDC ardently supported J. M. Keynes' critique of the Versailles Treaty and distributed copies of his *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Swanwick, *Builders of the Peace*, p. 191.

³ Morel, *The Black Man's Burden* (Manchester: National Labour Press, 1920), pp. 223-229.

⁴ Some of the ideas expressed in this work are presaged in Morel's book, *Africa and the Peace of Europe* (1917), and a pamphlet, *The African Problem and the Peace Settlement* (1917). Wuliger, "The Idea of Economic Imperialism", p. 376.

⁵ Morel, *Black Man's Burden*, p. 8. Morel was convinced that winter in Europe was "fatal to the tropical or sub-tropical African" (p. 9), but perhaps because he considered that there was a "force of character, innate in the white imperial peoples", (p. 5) he did not draw the obvious corollary that Africa was too hot for Europeans.

neutralize tropical Africa, allow free trade and the maintenance of native tribal customs, industries, and land rights.

Morel followed this work with articles on the same subject in the *Daily Herald* and in the *Nation*.¹ He repeated his strictures against French employment of Africans, "a race inspired by Nature . . . with tremendous sexual instincts". In particular he stressed the danger to defenceless British colonies from an armed French African soldiery and the possibilities of black mercenaries being used against trade union and revolutionary movements. When therefore the news reached London that the French had indeed used African troops to quell German civilians, Morel was obviously prepared to present his sensational article for the *Daily Herald*.

In the aftermath of the *Herald* article Morel stimulated the growing interest in French colonial troops on the Rhine by articles and letters in the press. In *Labour Leader*, an ILP journal, he wrote that these African troops were a "passively obedient instrument of . . . capitalist society" and a threat to European workers.² The troops, he informed more middle class readers, were also a threat to German women; rape, he reported, was a common offense in the Rhineland.³

After a fact-finding trip to Germany in the summer of 1920, Morel published a pamphlet, *The Horror on the Rhine*, which was his most complete elucidation of the "black menace".⁴ He repeated the main charges of his *Herald* article, and elaborated on them. African troops were bound to act worse than white soldiers because they were without their own women. Furthermore on the grounds that Africans were polygamous – legally so in North Africa – their "sex-impulse is a more instinctive impulse . . . more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than among European peoples hedged in by the complicated paraphernalia of convention and laws." Therefore the black troops

¹ *Daily Herald*, January 27, 1920; "The Employment of Black Troops", in: *Nation*, XXVI (March 27, 1920), p. 893. The *Nation* article was an outgrowth of Morel's discovery that the French had 30-40,000 coloured soldiers in their army of occupation. Part of this *Nation* article was reprinted, with favourable comments, in "The Looking Glass", in: *Crisis* (New York), XX (July, 1920), p. 141. *Crisis* was the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

² Morel, "The Slave Owner Spirit Again", in *Labour Leader*, April 22, 1920.

³ Morel, "The 'Horror on the Rhine'", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (August, 1920), p. 29. See also Morel, "The Peacewar", *ibid.*, II (November, 1920), pp. 69-70; Morel, "The Prostitution of the Rhineland", *ibid.*, II (June, 1921), p. 196.

⁴ "Our London Letter", in: *Labour Leader*, August 26, 1920; Morel to Philip Snowden, July 15, 1920, Parcel 252, UDC Collection, Library, University of Hull. The pamphlet was published in August, 1920 by the UDC. The British Museum has copies of the 3rd (1920) and 8th (1921) editions.

“*must be satisfied upon the bodies of white women*” (p. 10; italics in original).

French militarists have forced German officials to depose law-abiding citizens from their homes and make their dwellings into brothels for black and white French soldiers. The Germans are even required to pay for these places as part of occupation costs; and their children are exposed to black soldiers queuing before bordello doors. But houses of prostitution were not sufficient for the native troops.

“In ones and twos, sometimes in parties, big, stalwart men from warmer climes, armed with sword-bayonets or knives, sometimes with revolvers, living unnatural lives of restraint, their fierce passions hot within them, roam the countryside. Woe to the girl returning to her village home, or on the way to town with market produce, or at work alone hoeing in the fields. Dark forms come leaping out from the shadows of the trees, appear unexpectedly among the vines and grasses, rise from the corn where they have lain concealed. Then – the panic stricken flight which often availeth not. . . .” (p. 13; ellipses in original)

Morel supported his imaginative assertions with information from German press and police reports – he listed 80 cases of rape and attempted rape and he quoted press accounts of young girls missing and presumed murdered by Africans. Other girls were forced, often by starvation, into prostitution. Syphilis, which affects “a large proportion of the African troops”, has become an epidemic in the Rhineland.

Behind this “general process of debasement and demoralization” lies the French government. African troops are only imitating their “masters” who act like beasts toward the population in the occupied zone. The Germans might forget all of the violations of the Treaty of Versailles and the fraudulence of the League, but can they forget the “supreme outrage”, will they not remember the “tens of thousands of savage men”? “*Boys these men raped your mothers and sisters!*” (p. 22; italics in original) Will not, Morel asked, these actions drive the Germans into revanchism? And won’t Britain be dragged into a war brought about by these short-sighted vengeful actions of their French ally?

The Horror on the Rhine was an immediate success. The first two editions of 5,000 copies each were sold in less than a month; by April, 1921 there were eight editions. Foreign language editions were printed in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Italy. The Allied Rhineland Commission prohibited its circulation in the occupied zone but it is likely that German-language copies were distributed there.¹ It was

¹ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., p. 4.

said that the German edition led the Wittenberg Landtag to express the hope that public opinion would force the French to withdraw their native troops.¹

In British left-wing circles at least the reaction to Morel's pamphlet was highly favourable. "Here is Militarism stripped of its pompous grandeurs and glorifications and shown in a queue at the door of a brothel", wrote a reviewer for the ILP journal.² At the Trade Union Congress meeting in September, 1920 the Standing Orders Committee gave the UDC permission to present each delegate with a copy of *Horror on the Rhine*. It "produced a profound impression", recorded Morel's friend J. W. Kneeshaw, "I was astonished at the number who came and expressed their views about it to me." It left the trade unionists with "a feeling of physical and spiritual revulsion".³

II

Hardly before the print had dried on Morel's April 10 article when Mrs Philip Snowden announced to a meeting: "God bless the *Daily Herald* for printing E. D. Morel's article".⁴ The next issue of the *Herald* (April 12, 1920) reviewed Morel's article and stressed its sex themes: "ghastly outbreak of prostitution, rape and syphilis", "primitive sexual passions of these men", brothels "stocked with German women". "Women of England arise", editorialized the *Herald*. "Will not British women make their voice heard on the sexual horror involved in the setting up of brothels for savage soldiers brought from Africa by the French government and used in Germany?" This "is an intolerable outrage". On the following day the *Herald* bannered:

BRUTES IN FRENCH UNIFORM
DANGER TO GERMAN WOMEN FROM 30,000 BLACKS
BROTHELS NOT ENOUGH

Case studies of rapes were presented – in detail – and the editor enlisted the wisdom of Brigadier-General C. B. Thomson. The General, a Socialist and veteran of campaigns in Africa, pronounced knowledgeably about the "sexual proclivities" of Africans who "*in default of women of their own race* [must have] *intercourse with European wom-*

¹ "What We Think", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (January, 1921), pp. 104-105.

² J. W. Kneeshaw, "The Horror on the Rhine", in: *Labour Leader*, September 2, 1920. See also *Daily Herald*, September 1, 1920; "Coloured Troops in Germany", in: *Women's International League (British Section)*, *Monthly News Sheet*, VI (September, 1920), pp. 2-3. Copy in the British Museum.

³ J. W. Kneeshaw, "The Outlook", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (October, 1920), pp. 66-67.

⁴ *Daily Herald*, April 12, 1920.

en . . .". These "savages . . . being trained to the use of arms and taught to despise the European races" will be "ripe for mischief" and prey for demagogues when they return to Africa.¹

The *Herald's* cry for united female action was not muted. On April 21 the National Conference of Labour Women met in London and adopted a resolution calling for withdrawal of French African troops from Germany. The resolution was free from the evocative language found in the *Herald*, though Mrs Snowden, mover of the resolution, informed her eager and applauding audience that these blacks didn't have "the same powers of sexual control as more developed races"; they were a "menace to . . . white women". It wasn't a question of colour – Socialist women Mrs Snowden insisted were above such vulgar appeals – it was simply a "question of development".²

Six days later the British Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom held a protest meeting at Central Hall in Westminster. The meeting was co-sponsored by the *Daily Herald* and various women trade union and political societies: Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, Fabian Women's Group, Independent Women's Social and Political Union, National Federation of Women Teachers, Standing Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations, National Federation of Women Workers, Women's Co-Operative Guild. The meeting was chaired by Mrs H. M. Swanwick, President of the WILPF in Britain and a founder-member of the UDC. Showing she had no racial prejudices she pointed with pride to the Southern Synco-pated Orchestra, a minstrel group, then appearing in London. She urged the audience to buy *The Black Scourge in Europe*, a leaflet based on Morel's *Herald* article, and then introduced Morel as the main speaker. Addressing the largely female audience he told of 38,000 "big, powerful, muscular men with fierce, strong natural passions" bound to want European women and exposing them "to a terror which cannot be adequately described". The French had established bordellos "in some of the most ancient seats of European wisdom"; supposing he asked if the Germans had won the war and their black troops were

¹ Thomson's statement was written on April 10, evidently within hours of reading Morel's article, and sent directly to Morel. The *Black Scourge in Europe* (Being the reproduction with additional material of Mr. E. D. Morel's article in the 'Daily Herald' of April 10, 1920) (London: UDC, 1920), p. 3. A copy of this leaflet is in Parcel 279, "E. D. Morel", UDC Collection. Thomson, later Lord Thomson of Cardington, had served in South and West Africa. In 1924 he was appointed by MacDonalld as the First Secretary for Air. He was proposed for the General Council of the UDC in Autumn of 1920. Entry for September 21, 1920, Meetings of the Executive Council UDC, (DDC 1/5) UDC Collection.

² *Daily Herald*, April 22, 1920; *Morning Post*, April 22, 1920.

now in Wales, the West Riding, or Cornwall?¹ And what will be the repercussion when Africans who have “shot and bayoneted white men” and have “had sexual intercourse with white women” return to their homeland? The Africans were themselves innocent victims of a vicious French policy. Mrs Swanwick then moved the resolution:

“That in the interest of good feeling between all the races of the world and the security of all women, this meeting calls upon the League of Nations to prohibit the importation into Europe for warlike purposes, of troops belonging to primitive peoples, and their use anywhere, except for purposes of police and defence in the country of their origin.”

It was adopted unanimously. The proceedings of the meeting were printed and distributed by the Women’s International League.²

A few days before the Westminster meeting Morel spoke on, among other topics, the French use of coloured troops in Germany. The meeting was chaired by Ramsey MacDonald and sponsored by the UDC. Attending the meeting were representatives of over 100 ILP and trade union branches, trades councils, constituency parties, and co-operative societies.³

Outside of London resolutions dealing with the black troop issue were passed by Labour Party, ILP, women, and trade union groups in such places as Winchester, Bristol, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, South Norwood, Neaden, Darlington, Biggleswade, Leicester.⁴ Messages of support came from staunch trade unionists like Robert Smillie, Ben Turner, Robert Williams, Eleanor Rathbone, and J. R. Clynes. Thirteen Members of Parliament endorsed the resolution of the WILPF meeting. And the Countess of Warwick, then in a Socialist phase,

¹ Morel used this theme repeatedly, varying it with the type and location of his audience. In this speech Morel also made his oft-repeated claim that French native troops could be used against defenceless British colonies and against European workers.

² Women’s International League (British Section), *Coloured Troops in Europe* (London: WILPF, 1920), copy in the British Museum. See also Morel, “Black Troops in Germany”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, I (June, 1920), Special Supplement, pp. v-ix. The *Daily Herald’s* account was headlined: BLACK MENACE TO WOMEN. *Daily Herald*, April 19-20, 26, 28.

³ E. E. Hunter, “Labour and Foreign Affairs”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, I (May, 1920), pp. 16-17; *Morning Post*, April 26, 1920.

⁴ *Daily Herald*, April 14, 19, 1920; “Branch News”, *WILPF Monthly News Sheet*, VI (June, 1920), p. 4; Letter from Mrs E. Brennan, June 6, 1920, FO 371/3786 paper 202233/18; M. G. Townley to Cecil Harmsworth, June 21, 1920, FO 371/3787 paper 205271/18, Public Record Office.

added her sense of outraged propriety over these illicit affairs in the Rhineland.¹

The close ties between Morel and the UDC on one hand and the ILP on the other² meant that the use of African levies by the French would quickly become a political issue. Within a week after Morel's original article in the *Herald* the National Administrative Council of the ILP passed a resolution condemning the use of African troops and called upon the Parliamentary Labour Party to support this view.³ Two days later the National Executive of the Labour Party adopted a resolution calling attention of the allied governments to the "degrading and dangerous practice" of using coloured soldiers in Germany.⁴

It did not take official Party action however to force the quaint radical – and member of the ILP and UDC – Josiah Wedgwood to bring up the issue in Parliament. On April 14 he told the Commons that "we do not consider Senegalese proper troops to garrison German towns" and inquired if "black troops" had been withdrawn from Germany. Cecil Harmsworth, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, responded that this was a matter for the French government alone.⁵ On the following day, B. C. Spoor, a Labour MP from Durham (Bishop Auckland) asked the Prime Minister if he had seen Spoor's Notice of Motion that the House considered "the use of coloured troops by the Allies to control Germany is deplorable and should be discontinued?"⁶ Bonar Law (Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House

¹ Coloured Troops in Europe, p. 18.

² The ex-Liberals of the UDC moved into the ILP during the war and not only assumed positions of leadership but largely determined ILP foreign policy. Robert E. Dowse, *Left in Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940* (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 25-26, 49. The UDC provided a liaison between the Parliamentary Labour Party and the ILP. On a local level ILP and UDC chapters frequently consisted of the same persons; representatives of both groups contributed to each others journals. In addition the UDC was affiliated with trade union and Labour parties with a membership of 800,000 in April 1920 and over a million by November. "Six Years", in: *Foreign Affairs, II* (December, 1920), pp. 94-95; *Minute Book, General Council UDC, No 2*, pp. 15, 22 (DDC 1/2), UDC Collection.

In February, 1919 Morel was named an advisor to the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International Questions. Telegram Leonard Woolf to Morel, February 1, 1919, Newspaper Clippings, Miscellaneous 1919-1921, E. D. Morel Collection, Library, London School of Economics and Political Science. Morel was chosen a Labour candidate for Dundee in 1920 and two years later he defeated Winston Churchill for the seat. He was re-elected in 1923 and 1924. Wuliger, "The Idea of Economic Imperialism", pp. 426-427, 445-446, 492, 522.

³ *Daily Herald*, April 19, 1920.

⁴ *Ibid.*, April 21, 1920.

⁵ 127 HC Deb. 5 s. (April 14, 1920), p. 1659.

⁶ *Ibid.* (April 15, 1920), p. 1824. Spoor was on the General Council of the UDC and he became a minister in the first Labour government. He visited the occupied

of Commons) was as informative as Harmsworth.

On the following week William Lunn, a Labour MP from the West Riding, wished to know if the government had plans to bring the issue of black troops before the League of Nations. Bonar Law replied flatly: "the answer is in the negative." Lunn then wanted to know if the British government had made representations to the French government about their African soldiers and Wedgwood asked "is there any chance of His Majesty's Government making any protest against this outrage?" At which point Charles B. Stanton (Merthyr Tydvil, Aberdare), a government supporter, shouted: "You are an outrage here – three of you are 'Bolshies'." Bonar Law simply repeated his view that it was not the duty of the government or Parliament "to judge the action of another Government".¹

The government became slightly more informative in May.² Winston Churchill, responding to a question from a Labour MP, pointed out that of 95,000 French troops stationed in the occupied zone, 7,500 were colonials including one brigade of Senegalese. In the following two months Col. Wedgwood and Allen Parkinson (Labour MP from Wigan) raised the question of suppression of two German newspapers by the Rhineland High Commission for their remarks on African troops. Harmsworth and Bonar Law explained the details of the suppression, justified it, and then dismissed the matter as of little account.³ Three more times in 1920 and three times in 1921 the issue of black troops was raised. In all cases Labour MP's wanted information on coloured

zone in 1921 and reported that the African troops were being "used as the instruments of French hatred". He admitted that any army tends to be loose in its morals, but the Africans "are not restrained in their behaviour to women by the scruples and conventions inherent in European training, nor are their passions cooler for being used to a polygamous state of society." He feared the "rising tide of colour" and declared that it was a mistake to acquaint Africans with modern weapons and industrial techniques – "to impose obligations beyond their capacities upon primitive peoples is to injure their growth". Spoor, "Black and White on the Rhine", in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (November, 1921), p. 1.

¹ 128 HC Deb. 5 s. (April 22, 1920), p. 544. Bonar Law gave the same answer on May 12 to A. E. Waterson (Labour MP from Northampton, Kettering). 129 (May 12, 1920), p. 436.

² The Foreign Office investigated the French employment of native troops. They were satisfied that the troops were well behaved and charges against them were exaggerated. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, 1st series, IX, pp. 328, 332, 384-485.

³ 131 HC Deb. 5 s. (June 28, 1920), pp. 55-56; 132 (July 20, 1920), pp. 222-223. The number of colonial troops – Moroccans, Senegalese, Malagasies and a few Indochinese – stationed in the Rhineland varied from 5-20,000. There is no official proof that Morel or the Herald's charge of 30,000 or 40,000 "Black" troops in Germany was remotely correct.

soldiers and wanted to know what the government was doing about the situation. Ministers provided a few dry facts and fell back on the statements that it was either a French concern or that the High Commission was investigating allegations of wrong-doing by French native troops.¹

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 1920 *Labour Leader* opened its columns to Morel and other writers discussing the black troops issue. *Foreign Affairs* devoted a special supplement in July, 1920 to the subject.² Even the circular of the Northumberland Miners Association spread Morel's word to its readers.³

Morel's campaign was also supported by less radical, though still liberal, journals. *Contemporary Review* complained about the "admitted sexual excess of these Africans . . . and the setting up of filthy French brothels in tranquil and clean little towns. . . ."⁴ *Commonweal* reported on the "lust of black soldiery".⁵ The *Nation* contemptuously referred to "semi-savages", "black terrorists", and the "horrible excesses" of the African troops. It reported – untruthfully – that Senegalese were quartered in Goethe's home.⁶ France, propounded a *Nation* writer, "lost her political chance in the Rhineland from the hour she dragged these savages into her quarrel . . ." He was revolted by brothels for Africans located in "centres of an innocent and primitive country life".⁷

Morel's charges were given an intellectual patina by his friend Norman Angell. The latter argued in his *Fruits of Victory: A Sequel to 'The Great Illusion'* (London: W. Collins, 1921) that the most devastat-

¹ 133 HC Deb. 5 s. (October 21, 1920), p. 1062; 141 (May 11, 1921), p. 1895; 145 (July 27, 1921), p. 441; 147 (October 31, 1921), pp. 1342-1343. The issue was raised only once in the House of Lords. Lord Parmoor (a contributor to *Foreign Affairs*) asked if Senegalese troops had been removed from occupied Germany. The government spokesman insisted that he had no information and besides it was a French concern. 39 HL Deb. 5 s. (April 21, 1920), p. 919.

² By December 1920 *Foreign Affairs* had a circulation of 14-15,000. "Six Years", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II, pp. 94-95. Charles Trevelyan reported that in 1921 *Foreign Affairs* had a circulation of 20,000, "chiefly among the local leaders of the working class". *From Liberalism to Labour* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 86.

³ *Daily Herald*, April 14, 1920.

⁴ William Arbutt Dawson, "Germany and Spa", in: *Contemporary Review*, CXVIII (July, 1920), p. 8.

⁵ *Commonweal*, April 17, 1920, copy in Newspaper Clippings, Miscellaneous 1919-1921, Morel Collection.

⁶ "A London Diary", in: *Nation*, XXVII (April 10, 1920), pp. 37-38; "A London Diary", *ibid.*, (April 24, 1920), p. 104; "A London Diary", *ibid.*, (May 15, 1920), p. 197.

⁷ H.W.M., "A Glance at the French Occupation", in: *Nation and Athenaeum*, XXX (October 22, 1921), pp. 138-140.

ing manifestation of militarism was the training of Africans, showing them that Europeans could be defeated, and then have them quartered as conquerors – even in German university towns and in Goethe's own home. "The arming of the African negro . . . is the Servile State in its most sinister form; and unless Europe is itself ready for slavery it will stop this reintroduction of slavery for the purposes of militarism." (p. 325) Furthermore the French militarists probably intend to employ these "Cannibals from the African forests" in a "war upon a Workers' Republic" (p. 410).

III

Morel and his followers stressed the fact that their campaign against the French use of African troops was part of an international protest movement.¹ Thus Morel could boast that his *Herald* article of April 10 "was reproduced all over the world".² The issue would have still arisen without Morel, groups in Germany and France had already called attention to the "black scourge", but Morel and the UDC provided a focus and made certain that protest avoided a narrow nationalistic outlook – German sour grapes – and instead became part of a general criticism of imperialism and the Treaty of Versailles.

From the start French Socialists Jean Longuet (Marx's son-in-law), Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland and others supported Morel's attack on African troops in the Rhineland.³ Articles on the issue from *Le Populaire*, a Socialist newspaper, were translated into English and printed in the *Daily Herald*, *Labour Leader*, and *Foreign Affairs*. The Clarté group, which included the most militant elements in the Socialist party, was affiliated with the UDC and by late 1921 there was a French version of the UDC.⁴ As in Britain French Socialist women's organizations passed resolutions favouring withdrawal of African troops from the Rhineland. It should be stressed however that French Socialists were more reluctant to play on vicarious sexual fears than Morel and his confreres. French critics, perhaps because they were Latins and because they were more consistently Marxist, considered

¹ No effort has been made to comb European newspapers and periodicals. I have concentrated on Morel's response to European protests in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*, *Labour Leader*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily News* and in the newspaper clippings of the Morel Collection.

² Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine*, 3rd ed., p. 6. See also "The Black Troops", in: *Outlook* (New York), CXXVII (March 16, 1921), p. 424.

³ *Labour Leader*, April 29, 1920.

⁴ Swanwick, *Builders of the Peace*, p. 130; "A French Union of Democratic Control", in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (December, 1921), p. 90.

class more important than race. The black troops were, Romain Rolland stated, "the logical consequence of wars of extortion and of massacre in Africa".¹ The French Socialists were concerned mostly with the danger of the African troops being used as tools of the French ruling class and as instruments to suppress the working class.

German protest took many forms. Some of it was blatantly chauvinistic propaganda.² Right-wing groups cited Morel as an authority and Morel himself was accused of connections with the *European Press*, a propaganda organ owned by coal and newspaper baron Hugo Stinnes; the *European Press* played up African "atrocities" in the occupied zone.³ Morel and the UDC worked intimately with the Heidelberg Group (Heidelberger Vereinigung) which included such well known figures as Prince Max of Baden, Professor Lujo Brentano, Count Max Montgelas, and Professor Walter Schücking. The Group sponsored publication of *The Horror on the Rhine* and provided Morel with information about conditions in the occupied zone.⁴

Morel was able to count on support for his campaign from groups in the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Ireland, Poland, New Zealand, and the United States. In Italy, Hungary, Austria, France and Czechoslovakia there were branches of the UDC.⁵ Morel could count on prominent names – Enrico Ferri and Count Lucidi of Italy, George Brandes of Denmark,

¹ Rolland, "Europe and the Coloured People", in: *Foreign Affairs*, I (May, 1920), p. 1. See also Jean Longuet's statement addressed to the Westminster meeting, "What We Think", *ibid.*, p. 2, and Henri Barbusse in "Widespread International Support for Mr. Morel's Protest", *ibid.*, I (June, 1920), Special Supplement, p. x. Morel quoted in his *Daily Herald* article the French journal Clarté's views about the "barely restrainable beastiality of the black troops".

² Lewis S. Gannett, "Those Black Troops on the Rhine- and the White", in: *Nation* (New York), CXII (May 25, 1921), p. 733; "The Return of the Hyphen", in: *Literary Digest* (New York), LXVIII (March 12, 1921), p. 14; Arnold Robertson to Earl Curzon, October 13, 1920, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, 1st series, X, pp. 317-320. There was even a German film, "The Black Horror". Norbert Sevestre, "La Honte Noire", in: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXV (September 15, 1921), pp. 418, 420-421, 432.

³ "African Troops in Europe", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (July, 1920), p. 10; *Times*, October 21, 29, 1920; Morel's letter in *European Press*, March 11, 1921, copy in Newspaper Clippings, Miscellaneous 1919-1921, Morel Collection.

⁴ Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine*, 3rd ed., title page; "The 'Horror on the Rhine'", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (October, 1920), p. 64. See also A. G. Gardiner, *What I Saw in Germany* (Letters from Germany and Austria) (London and Manchester: Daily News, 1920), p. 58.

⁵ Swanwick, *Builders of the Peace*, pp. 131-132; "African Troops in Europe", in: *Foreign Affairs*, II, p. 10; "A Hungarian UDC", *ibid.*, II (May, 1921), p. 170; Morel's letter in *Daily News*, February 16, 1921; "Correspondence", in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (October, 1921), p. 61.

and Jerome K. Jerome of the United States – to adorn his articles and pamphlets on the subject of black troops. More important groups from neutral states lent credence to the campaign by making “objective” reports of conditions in the Rhineland. Morel quoted in detail comments from a Swedish mission which studied the French zone of occupation. They were alarmed about brothels for African soldiers found in working class districts and about the spread of syphilis. These Nordics seemed perturbed by Negroes traversing the streets after dark, “which made a very disagreeable impression, especially when the streets are ill lighted”.¹

European women like their British sisters rallied to Morel’s cause. Fifty-nine Swedish female societies and 50,000 Swedish women signed a petition protesting this “outrage upon womanhood all the world over”; and their statement was published in a pamphlet: *Coloured Frenchmen on the Rhine*.² The Association of Dutch Women for Social Welfare petitioned the League of Nations to intervene in the Rhineland.³ From Germany the Rhenish Women’s League worked with the governments of the German states of Bavaria, Hesse, and Prussia to collect and publish information on atrocities committed by coloured soldiers. The League also made arrangements for sympathetic observers to investigate conditions in the Rhineland and sent depositions and police reports to Morel.⁴ The women’s society of the German Evangelical churches thanked Morel for his *Herald* article and British workers for their demonstrations against the French affront to German women.⁵ In addition twenty German women’s organizations joined religious and political groups urging the League of Nations to consider this “scandal”.⁶ Frau Rohl, a Social Democratic member of the Reichstag, allowed Morel to print her statement: “We appeal to the women of the world to support us in our protest against the utterly unnatural occupation by coloured troops of German districts along the

¹ Morel, “The Prostitution of the Rhineland”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (June, 1921), p. 196. See also letter of Col. Peterson of the Swedish army in Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., p. 4.

² “Foreign News”, in: WILPF, *Monthly News Sheet*, V (July, 1920), p. 3; “France’s ‘Terrible’ Black Troops”, in: *Literary Digest*, LXVI (August 28, 1920), p. 22.

³ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., p. 4; “The Horror on the Rhine”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (March, 1921), p. 145.

⁴ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., p. 4; Morel letter in *Daily News*, September 3, 1921; Margarete Gärtner, *Botschafterin des guten Willens: Aussenpolitische Arbeit 1914-1950* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1955), p. 64.

⁵ Letter from the Vereinigung evangelischer Frauenverbände Deutschlands, June 7, 1920, FO 371/3786 paper 202095/18.

⁶ “Coloured Troops in Germany”, in: WILPF *Monthly News Sheet*, VI (September, 1920), p. 3.

Rhine.”¹ The Countess Montgelas reinforced the Socialist sister’s general statement with a detailed account of a girl’s rape; “a particularly horrible incident which British mothers may note and ponder over”.²

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom lent its significant voice and influence to the campaign. Founded by American reformers, its brand of liberalism and anti-war attitudes made it a natural ally of the UDC. In England the WILPF and UDC shared speakers and directors; they reported each others news and worked together in exposing the “Black Horror”. Branches in other countries issued protests and the headquarters body stationed in Geneva supported these efforts – at least initially.³ The combined WILPF at their Third Congress in Vienna (July, 1921) resolved “that the League make every possible effort to oppose the military use of ‘native’ populations”.⁴

Within a few days of Morel’s *Herald* article a group of Americans in Berlin called for a mass meeting at which French policy was criticised.⁵ In the United States itself there was during 1920 only a minor interest in the “Black Horror”, though Morel was asked to lecture on the subject and at handsome fees.⁶ He was given some favourable publicity in the New York *Freeman* then edited by two liberals, Francis Nielson and Albert Jay Nock.⁷

The main American protest did not appear until Winter of 1921. It appears to have been propagated chiefly by German and Irish-American organizations and culminated in a mass meeting of 12,000 people in Madison Square Garden on February 28. At the meeting a petition was sent to Congress “to instruct the President forthwith to inform the French Republic that the moral sense of the American people demands the immediate withdrawal of the uncivilized French coloured troops . . . and the assurance that . . . a speedy and perma-

¹ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., title page.

² “Correspondence”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (November, 1921), p. 78. In the previous month *Foreign Affairs* printed a letter from an English WILPF member who had seen Senegalese soldiers in Wiesbaden. She had talked to German women about them and they told her “if English mothers only knew the truth about these things . . .”, “Correspondence”, *ibid.*, III (October, 1921), p. 61.

³ “Resolution by the French Section of the Women’s International League on the Use of Black Troops”, *ibid.*, I (June, 1920), Special Supplement, p. xi.

⁴ Resolutions passed at the Third Congress of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Vienna, July 10-17, 1921 (Vienna: Otto Maass, 1921), p. 4. Copy in the British Museum.

⁵ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 3rd ed., p. 7.

⁶ “The Horror on the Rhine”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, II (March, 1921), p. 145.

⁷ Morel, *Horror on the Rhine*, 8th ed., p. 3; *Freeman*, April 27, 1921, Newspaper Clippings, Miscellaneous 1919-1921, Morel Collection.

ment stop be put to the 'horror of the Rhine'.¹ Literature to fan the flame in America was sent from nationalist bodies in Germany.² While it would be impossible to attribute this propaganda to Morel – one American journal did – the appeals were often similar, in particular the appeal to white womanhood. Of course the United States was not without a tradition on the subject and it had a time-honoured solution. An American woman, according to an approving German publication, was reported to have advised Rhinelanders to take justice in their own hands. "Your weapons have been taken from you, but there still remains a rope and a tree. Take up the natural arms which our men in the South resort to: lynch! Hang every black who assaults a white person!"³

IV

Opposition to Morel's heated charges was sporadic. British dailies seldom considered the issue at all or simply dismissed Morel and his left wing supporters as Germanophiles.⁴ They did not analyse the facts or the implications of Morel's protest. Since Morel's appeal was made largely to a liberal and labour audience it would be more significant to depict the opposition within those circles.

Within a few days of Morel's article in the *Daily Herald* George Lansbury received an indignant letter from Claude McKay, a West Indian poet-radical then living in London. Lansbury returned the letter with the lame excuse that it was too long for publication.

¹ "The Return of the Hyphen", in: *Literary Digest*, LXVIII (March 12, 1921), p. 14; "The Rhine's 'Black Horror' Faded", *ibid.*, LXIX (June 25, 1921), p. 14; *Times*, March 2, 1921.

² "The Return of the Hyphen", in: *Literary Digest*, LXVIII, p. 14; "Is the Black Horror on the Rhine Fact or Propaganda?", in: *Nation* (New York), CXIII (July 13, 1921), p. 45; Sevestre, "La Honte Noire", in: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXV, pp. 418, 431. Morel took a great interest in American affairs, but he either was little aware of the protest movement in the United States or he wished to disassociate himself from it. The Morel Collection does have a clipping on the African soldier question from the *Gaelic American*, April 30, 1921 and Morel's letter in the *Freeman*, April 27, 1921.

³ "Is the Black Horror on the Rhine Fact or Propaganda?", in: *Nation*, CXIII, p. 45. See also Lewis S. Gannett, "The Horror on the Rhine Again", *ibid.*, CXIII (September 7, 1921), p. 264. A French journalist unfairly bunched Miss Beveridge with Morel: "zélées recrues du Barnum pangermain . . ." Sevestre, "La Honte Noire", in: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXV, p. 430.

⁴ The *Daily News* gave Morel a sympathetic hearing on the subject. They sent a reporter to Germany who investigated the charges made against colonial troops. He concluded that there was little substance in the accusations, though these troops "embittered" Franco-German relations. Gardiner, *What I Saw in Germany*, p. 58.

McKay, who was employed as a reporter by Sylvia Pankhurst, published the letter in her *Workers' Dreadnought*. "Why", McKay asked, "all this obscene maniacal outburst about the sex vitality of black men in a proletarian paper?" Rape is rape; the colour of the skin doesn't make it different. Negroes are no more over-sexed than Caucasians; mulatto children in the West Indies and America were not the result of parthenogenesis. If Negro troops had syphilis, they contracted it from the white and yellow races. As for German women, in their economic plight they were selling themselves to anyone. McKay concluded: "I do not protest because I happen to be a negro . . . I write because I feel that the ultimate result of your propaganda will be further strife and blood-spilling between whites and the many members of my race . . . who have been dumped down on the English docks since the ending of the European war . . . Bourbons of the United States will thank you, and the proletarian underworld of London will certainly gloat over the scoop of the Christian-Socialist-pacifist *Daily Herald*."¹

McKay's criticism evidently struck home. Lansbury and Morel went to great lengths to explain that they were without racial prejudice. Morel even argued that the existence of African troops in Europe was an inducement to race prejudice. He foresaw an American "problem" evolving in Europe and feared an American solution – lynching.²

Left-wing opposition in Britain was rare and certainly less articulate than McKay's missive. One Socialist, and a man with considerable experience in Africa, was irate over Morel's "so-called physiological facts"; such views were "one of the great sources of racial hatred and should never be given currency".³ George Bernard Shaw when asked

¹ Claude McKay, "A Black Man Replies", in: *Workers' Dreadnought*, April 24-1920; Wayne Cooper and Robert C. Reinders, "A Black Briton Comes 'Home': Claude McKay in England, 1920", in: *Race*, IX (July, 1967), p. 71. McKay's letter was reprinted in Marcus Garvey's *Negro World* (New York). See also a letter from a Cardiff Negro signed "One of the Oppressed". At first he thought the *Herald* was guilty of racial prejudice, but no longer. Labour and the Negro are minorities who have been criticised for being unable to rule. Of course the Negro he declares – with irony? – does not ask for social equality, "only the right to live and obtain the just reward of our part in the Great War for White Nations". *Daily Herald*, April 24, 1920.

² *Daily Herald*, April 10, 26, 1920; Morel, untitled speech, 1921 in Parliament, *Miscellaneous Speeches*, Morel Collection; E. E. Hunter, "Labour and Foreign Affairs", in: *Foreign Affairs*, I (May, 1920), p. 17.

³ Letter from Norman Leys, *Daily Herald*, April 17, 1920. General Sir Harry Johnston asked on the basis of his African experience for a statement on the "Black Horror" replied that reports of atrocities by Africans in Europe originated in "hysteria and unfounded accusations". He said that Negro troops were better behaved than white ones. WILPF, *Coloured Troops in Europe*, p. 19.

to comment on the use of African soldiers suggested that *all* troops should be sent home. To Shaw the danger was not the plight of German women, but rather that African tribes converted by European missionaries to a “sort of emotional Christianity” might some day become “black Crusaders marching to rescue Europe from the hands of Saracens of modern imperialism, rationalism, and Mammon worship”. Furthermore by arming and training coloured peoples the French and British “have not even as much sense as the Roman gladiators who never trained their pupils without reserving one trick to kill them by in the event of their being cast against one another in the arena.”¹ Less ambiguous than Shaw an un-named radical attending a conference declared that a leaflet announcing the Westminster protest meeting and given to all of the delegates smacked of “racial hatred”. Ramsey MacDonald, as chairman, finally squelched the heckler.²

Many important figures in the ILP-UDC axis said nothing. Whether this was because they were opposed to Morel’s charges or, more likely, because they were supremely indifferent would be difficult to ascertain.³ Several liberal and socialist journals showed only token interest in the subject; on the other hand they never attacked Morel for his extreme statements. The *New Statesman* for example ignored the issue until July 1921 when a “special correspondent” reported the findings of a Swedish church committee which had concluded that accounts of atrocities by African troops were greatly exaggerated. The writer felt the French should remove their colonial soldiers because it gave the Germans a propaganda weapon and it exacerbated the tense situation in Central Europe.⁴ Morel was not mentioned.

The Women’s International League, which had endorsed Morel’s campaign, became more critical of marked appeals to race prejudice. As early as July, 1920 a writer, without referring to the African troop question, informed her fellow WILPF members that women have been frightened of dealing with coloured races by white males. Yet these men have “ignored the sanctity of women wherever [they] went.”⁵ English WILPF leadership by Spring 1921 were considering

¹ Coloured Troops in Europe, p. 20.

² Morning Post, April 26, 1920. See above p. 10.

³ A study of the minute books of the Attercliffe and the Sheffield ILP branches show no interest in black troops. Copies of the minutes are in the Department of Local History and Archives, Central Library, Sheffield. The minutes of the Executive Council and the General Council of the UDC never deal with the issue though the General Council passed resolutions condemning occupation of the Rhineland. UDC Collection.

⁴ “Coloured Troops in the Occupied Provinces”, in: *New Statesman*, XVII (July 2, 1921), pp. 353-354.

⁵ Josephine Ransom, “Women in International Politics”, in: *WILPF Monthly News Sheet*, V (July, 1920), p. 1. Ransom was editor of the *Britain and India Magazine*.

an Anglo-French request to investigate coloured soldiers in Germany; they agreed that “the root evil . . . is the question of any sort of Occupation, and that a stand point from which [an investigation] should . . . be approached is that of the demoralization involved to the troops themselves.”¹ Rather than conduct an investigation the WILPF held a Conference on the Consequences of an Army of Occupation on June 8, 1921. During the Conference a Swedish woman made a proposal about the removal of African troops; the final resolution however called for an early termination of occupation without any mention of the racial composition of the armies.² Though the WILPF continued to concern itself with the problems of occupation and reparations, it never again brought up the issue of French colonial levies.

On the Continent and in America some liberals and socialists were cold to Morel’s crusade. Charles Gide, prominent Socialist, member of the French UDC, and contributor to *Foreign Affairs*, accused Morel of outright Negrophobia. Morel wants to protect the African, but Gide shrewdly remarks, “le genre de protection de M. Morel rappelle un peu le précepte que fait afficher la Société protectrice des animaux: ‘Soyez bons pour les bêtes’.” He blamed Morel of over-exaggerating reports, of assuming that polygamy at home leads to sexual license abroad, and of stirring up the Americans. He agreed with Morel that a black conscript army could become a praetorian guard to be used by French militarists.³

In Germany an Independent Socialist deputy caused a storm in the Reichstag. Answering the German Foreign Minister’s attack on French use of Africans in the Rhineland Frau Zeitz declared, “This is only a racial fight against the blacks”, and “It is the fault of the capitalistic governments that the blacks have remained behind in civilization. The history of the German colonial policy is one long string of cruelty.” She was shouted down with cries of “Shame” and “Paint yourself black” and “left to address empty benches”.⁴ The Communist *Rote*

¹ “Headquarters News”, *ibid.*, VII (May, 1921), p. 4.

² “Headquarters News”, *ibid.*, VII (June, 1921), p. 3; “Conference on Consequences of an Army of Occupation”, *ibid.*, VII (July, 1921), p. 3.

³ Gide, “L’Armée Noire”, in: *Foi et Vie*, March 16, 1921, Newspaper Clippings 1920-1923, Morel Collection. For another criticism of Morel see “Le Défaitisme de la Paix en Angleterre. J.-M. Keynes et E.-D. Morel”, in: *Mercure de France* (November 1, 1923), pp. 607-620, copy in Newspaper Clippings 1920-1923, Morel Collection.

⁴ *Times*, May 21, 1920; *Washington Bee* (Washington D.C.), May 29, 1920; *Daily Herald*, May 21, 1920; Lord Kilmanock despatch, n.d., FO 371/3785 paper 199677/18.

Fahne blamed the “black horror” on “chauvinistic criers” who were blind to far worse German atrocities during the war.¹

A sampling of three American liberal periodicals – *Outlook*, *New Republic*, *Nation* – indicates a greater awareness of the “black horror” question than their counterparts in Great Britain.² The *Nation* and *Outlook* quote extensively from French, American and German reports, official as well as newspaper accounts, which disprove Morel’s thesis. *Outlook* accused Morel personally of making an appeal to prejudice and being a German “apologist”.³ A *Nation* reporter, Lewis S. Gannett, did extensive research into Morel’s specific charges of rape and assault. He concluded that some of these cases were valid but fewer than charged and not all of these involved coloured soldiers. The French government sternly dealt with any crimes toward civilians. Brothels for black and white French soldiers, about which Morel complained, were in almost all cases operated as highly successful businesses by German local governments. Perhaps with the English Left in mind Gannett concluded that “I must part company with friends who exploit . . . race prejudice in their protest against a real but different abuse.” “There is a black horror on the Rhine, but it is not a Negro horror”.⁴

The *New Republic*, which in so many matters echoed the views of the UDC, editorialized against the “familiar charges of fiendish lusts, ungovernable brutality, which have served for so many years to justify lynchings at home”. Atrocities, they admitted, “have been committed by coloured troops; more atrocities are alleged; but through it all runs the implication that the horror of them is greatly deepened by the fact of colour.” It is not, the editor insisted, “the fact of coloured forces serving on the Rhine against which an honest protest can be made, but the fact of unfree armies, no matter where they are garrisoned, enlisted and trained to serve as instruments of . . . militarism . . .”⁵

¹ “Is the Black Horror on the Rhine Fact or Propaganda?”, in: *Nation*, CXIII, p. 44. For other German newspaper comments questioning stories about atrocities see “The Black Troops”, in: *Outlook*, CXXVII (March 16, 1921), pp. 424-425.

² For the hostile attitude of several New York dailies see “The Return of the Hyphen”, in: *Literary Digest*, LXVIII, pp. 14-15.

³ “Propaganda about the Black Troops”, in: *Outlook*, CXXVII (March 9, 1921), p. 363.

⁴ Gannett, “Those Black Troops on the Rhine – and the White”, in: *Nation*, CXII, pp. 733-734; Gannett, “The Horror on the Rhine Again”, *ibid.*, CXIII, p. 264; “The Black Troops on the Rhine”, *ibid.*, CXII, p. 366.

⁵ “African Troops on the Rhine”, in: *New Republic*, XXVI (March 9, 1921), pp. 29-30.

Negro journals in the United States also reprinted European denials of crimes by native troops.¹ Most of these reports were taken, without comment, from press releases. One however, printed in the *Washington Bee*, deserves special treatment because it is an account of an American Negro who baited the “black horror” in its European den. Dr John R. Hawkins, representing the African Methodist Episcopal church, at a World Ecumenical Conference in Geneva took umbrage at a German clergyman who attacked the conduct of coloured troops in occupied Germany. “It was most unfortunate . . . he should take occasion to drag into this place for high and lofty sentiments the slime and venom of the monster, colour prejudice.” Crimes “committed by soldiers drunk with the feeling of resentment and the passions of bloody battles” have followed all wars; “there is no reason for making this invidious distinction and holding up the coloured troops alone to be guilty of such atrocities.” The “dusky sons of Ham”, whether from Africa or America, have come to Europe “as among the bravest of the brave and the noblest of the noble, and I will not be silent while their record is attacked.”²

V

By the summer of 1921 Morel’s crusade had spent itself. It was dead, or so it seemed except to a few UDC members³ and E. D. Morel. Indeed Morel until his death in 1924 persisted in painting pictures of the “black horror” to audiences increasingly bored with the subject.⁴

¹ *Washington Bee*, February 19, 26, 1921; “Blacks Defended in German Paper”, in: *Crisis*, XXI (March, 1921), 222; “The Senegalese Again”, *ibid.*, XX (August, 1920), p. 190; “The Looking Glass”, *ibid.*, XX (July, 1920), pp. 141-142.

² *Washington Bee*, October 9, 1920.

³ Norman Angell, “France and the Black Power”, in: *Contemporary Review*, CXXI (February, 1922), pp. 226-229; Ben C. Spoor, “Black and White on the Rhine”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (December, 1921), p. 1; Joseph King, “French and British in Occupied Germany”, *ibid.*, III (June, 1922), p. 184-185; “Correspondence”, *ibid.*, IV (July, 1922), pp. 120-121; Brent Dow Allinson, “The Double Curse in Germany”, *ibid.*, IV (May, 1923), pp. 233-234; Hugh F. Spender, “The Rhineland Amnesty”, *ibid.*, VI (November, 1924), p. 94; Spender, “Coloured Troops in the Palatinate”, *ibid.*, VI (January, 1925), p. 150.

⁴ Morel kept his Dundee constituents informed about the “black horror”. *Dundee Advertiser*, October 17, 1923, *Newspaper Clippings 1920-1923*, Morel Collection. Morel’s last impact may have been in Scotland. In 1923 the Committee on Social Problems of the United Free Church of Scotland investigated charges made against French colonial troops and concluded that “a shameful outrage on civilization was being perpetrated”. The next year the General Assembly of the Free Church sent a memorial to Ramsey MacDonald stating that the “continuous presence among a civilian population in Europe of some 40,000 soldiers, belonging to a polygamous order of society, and separated from

In particular he used his Parliamentary seat to acquaint his peers, and by inference the nation, with the menace of African soldiers in central Europe. In his first address he excoriated French policy and announced that he opposed any effort “calculated to extend the area of French military occupation with black troops or other . . .”¹ The French, he informed Commons a few weeks later, had treated the Rhineland “like a conquered Province”; they had introduced African troops, forced municipal authorities to build brothels and furnish white women for the blacks – “an abominable thing”. If French policy persists and French demands for reparations continue then Morel predicted chaos will result in Germany; “there will be a complete swing to the Extreme Right . . . and worst of all, you will turn every German democrat into a raving nationalist.” France with a black conscript army and the wealth of the Ruhr will “create an economic hegemony in Europe . . . which was never dreamed of by Napoleon in his wildest dreams.”²

Significantly Morel’s UDC and ILP associates who often followed his speeches in the House and who agreed with him on many points never, excepting Lt. Com. Kenworthy, mentioned black troops.³ Morel’s friend Arthur Ponsonby cautioned Morel, probably in 1922, that atrocity stories involving African soldiers might be German propaganda.⁴ This sage advice had no effect on Morel; he continued to speak about the “black horror” and vent his hostility toward French “militarists”.⁵ There is undoubtedly truth in the assertion that he was not considered for Foreign Secretary in the MacDonald government because of his violent anti-French attitudes.⁶

If Morel could not sit in Whitehall he could claim, if he had known the facts, that his black troops campaign had slightly influenced

women of their own race, creates a situation in which grave moral disorders become inevitable.” Morel’s writings were cited as proof of their accusations. MacDonald evidently made no public reply to the memorial but Brigadier General C. B. Thomson, Secretary of State for Air, read and approved the clergymen’s draft. Morel was also an authority for Professor James Stalker D.D. of Aberdeen who published his findings in the *British Weekly*, October 4, 1923. “African Troops in Europe”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, VI (September, 1924), p. 66.

¹ 159, HC Deb. 5 s. (November 24, 1922), p. 223.

² *Ibid.* (December 14, 1922), pp. 3258-3267.

³ The few MP’s, other than Morel and Kenworthy, who introduced the black troops issue after 1921 were Conservatives or Liberals. 150 HC Deb. 5 s. (February 22, 1922), p. 1867; 151 (March 6, 1922), p. 833; 152 (March 29, 1922), pp. 1304-1305; 161 (March 7, 1923), p. 456; 181 (March 4, 1925), p. 406.

⁴ Wuliger, “The Idea of Economic Imperialism”, p. 457.

⁵ See undated speech (1923?) in *Parliament, Speeches 1922-1924*, Morel Collection.

⁶ Arthur Marwick, *Clifford Allen: The Open Conspirator* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 86.

British foreign policy. News of the French occupation of Frankfurt on April 6 led Lloyd George into one of his frequent states of Franco-phobia.¹ But there is no evidence that Morel's article influenced Lloyd George's dealings with Alexandre Millerand when they met at San Remo later in the month. Nor is there evidence that the people who played an important role in foreign policy – Curzon, Riddell, Harding, d'Abernon, Vansittart, Nicholson, Derby – showed any concern over the issue. They tended to be hostile toward Germany, though not always pro-French, and therefore probably dismissed Morel as a Germanophile. Vansittart, the only one of the above to mention in a published diary or autobiography the protest over use of African soldiers, scathingly remarked: "French Moors in the Ruhr, better behaved than German soldiery, were the object of continual abuse and occasional solicitation; but piebald babies were another myth credited with horror by British advocates of racial equality".²

The government was not, however, ignorant of the problem. Churchill brought to the attention of the Cabinet in December, 1919 a report which discussed, among other subjects, the negative effect of African troops on German public opinion. The Foreign Office was aware through its Consul in Frankfurt and through other channels of information that the French use of colonial troops had aroused resentment in the Rhineland and that Morel was responsible for foreign and domestic protests over the issue. "Mr. Morel", commented a Foreign Office official, "is characteristically wild and reckless, but it is a bad business."³ Lloyd George too became increasingly aware of the issue and though he made no public comment he stated years later:

¹ Lord Riddell's *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After 1918-1923* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p. 177.

² *The Mist Procession: The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 302. Vansittart disliked the "fuddled Union of Democratic Control", *ibid.*, p. 323. In 1922 Curzon, then in opposition, asked the government how many native troops the French had in the Rhineland. The answer was the same as that which he would probably have prepared for his Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs: there were 18,020; they were part of the French home army and "as such are considered Frenchmen" and of no concern to His Majesty's government. 151, HC Deb. 5 s. (March 6, 1922), p. 833.

³ Cabinet Paper CP 381 of 20 December, 1919, Public Record Office; Cecil Gosling despatch May 17, 1920, FO 371/3785 paper 198612/18; Minute of S.P. Waterlow, June 23, 1920, FO 371/3787 paper 205271/18. The American State Department in June 1920 asked General Henry T. Allen, commander of the United States forces in the occupied zone, to investigate charges of atrocities by French African troops. He concluded that most of these stories were "pure inventions", Allen, *My Rhineland Journal* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), p. 123; *Times*, February 22, 1921; "The Black Troops on the Rhine", in: *Nation*, CXII, p. 365.

“Provocative incidents are the inevitable consequences of any occupation of territory by foreign troops. The irritating and occasionally odious accompaniments of such an occupation of German towns by troops, some of whom were coloured, had much to do with the fierce outbreak of patriotic sentiment in Germany . . .”¹

Better proof of his contemporary concern is found in the secret proceedings at Spa (July 1920) where Lloyd George, Millerand, and Francesco Nitti met for the first time since the peace treaty with representatives of the German government. The question of black troops was introduced by Hugo Stinnes who in an aggressive tone informed the Allies that they couldn't force the Germans to increase coal deliveries, and “If black troops – those worthy instruments of Allied policy – are used for this purpose, the feelings of every white man will recoil, nor will the Allies get any coal”. Lloyd George was irate and told Riddell that he now had met a “real jack-boot German”.² But Stinnes' unattractive personality did not prevent the British Prime Minister in secret session with Allied representatives from bringing up French colonial troops. He told the French that one of the six conditions by which the British would support an occupation of the Ruhr was “that no black troops would be sent under the French Commander-in-Chief”. Lloyd George declared that he was not opposed to coloured soldiers as such, Britain had “gallant black troops” in the war, but he could understand German feelings about the issue and, à la Morel, he could imagine the attitude in England if it had been occupied by German African regiments. “It was”, he advised, “no use irritating the Germans unnecessarily.” As soon as Lloyd George finished, the normally mild-mannered Millerand stated that he wanted to make one point clear. It would perhaps be best not to use colonial troops – Foch was to be the final judge – but “this discussion should involve no sort of aspersion on the black troops. Germany had worked up a great campaign against them which had been carefully examined and proved utterly false.” The Anglo-French agreement was not to be considered a condemnation of African soldiers, “nor any renouncement of his [Foch's] right to use them anywhere else”.³

On July 14, while Millerand was in Paris, Lloyd George told the German Foreign Minister that the Allies would occupy the Ruhr if the Germans did not comply with the Treaty of Versailles. He had however

¹ David Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Treaty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 281.

² Viscount D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace*, (2 vols; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), I, p. 64; Riddell, *Intimate Diary*, p. 247.

³ Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, 1st series, VIII, pp. 601-604.

dissuaded the French from using African soldiers in any occupation. Lloyd George “knew the prejudice the use of black troops always created among a white population.”¹ When in January 1923 the French and Belgians entered the Ruhr their troops were white.²

To Lloyd George the French use of Africans was a minor pin-prick, but to Nitti, the Italian Prime Minister (1919-1920), it was a major obstacle to peace. In a book published in 1923 he devoted sixteen pages to “The Army of Occupation on the Rhine and Negro Violence in Europe”.³ He did extensive research, including total cost to German municipalities for establishing bordellos for French troops. Nitti blamed the Inter-Allied Commission for allowing a situation in which “German women . . . prostitute themselves to Central African negroes” (p. 118). The cities occupied by these Africans “are among the most cultured on earth; illiteracy is unknown in them, and the passion for art is at its highest among their inhabitants. The Rhine cities . . . now lodge negroes who come from mud huts.” (p. 123) In the land of Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Wagner “Orchestras of negroes and African barbarians play in the squares . . . and programmes of African music are given frequently.” (p. 123)

In the spirit of Machiavelli Nitti admits that “whatever is necessary in war becomes also legitimate” including use of black soldiers, men “of inferior civilization from the heart of Africa – men who until yesterday were, and perhaps still are, cannibals” (p. 125). But peace is different. Why have the French brought to the “green shores” of the Rhine the “black faces of African cannibals”? (p. 128) It could only mean that the French intend “to humiliate, outrage, and offend all their German sentiments of family pride, of race, and of honour” (p. 126). It is part of the vindictive and short-sighted policy France has followed since 1919.

It is more than likely that Nitti read Morel. Certainly Morel and the UDC were more favourably inclined to Nitti and his successor, Giovanni Giolitti, than any other statesman in Europe. Nitti’s views were “a justification of our [UDC] whole policy”. Giolitti, “Italy’s venerable statesman, offered”, Morel declared, “a great inspiration to all others working in the UDC” and Giolitti’s “courageous initiative . . . set an example to all the Governments.” He was, *Foreign Affairs* editorialized,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 620.

² MacDonald supposedly approached the French Premier Eduard Herriot about removing colonial soldiers from the occupied zone. The French refused. Spender, “The Rhineland Amnesty”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, VI, p. 94.

³ Nitti, *The Decadence of Europe: The Paths of Reconstruction* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923), pp. 113-129.

“the sole prominent European statesman who seems to recognize the necessity of building up a new order of foreign relationships . . .”¹

VI

The question to be asked in this paper is not why the French employed African soldiers in the Rhineland, nor whether these troops were guilty of the charges brought against them, but why Morel and some of his associates in the UDC and ILP should have introduced the issue and in the provocative manner in which they did. Why should they have singled out the few thousand Africans stationed in the Rhineland for special obloquy? Claude McKay, writing years after the event, offered an explanation. The British Socialists, he contended, were fearful that the French militarists intended to destroy the nascent German republic and with it the power of the Social Democrats – the white hope of the Second International. In view of anti-German feeling in Great Britain the only way to “arouse the notorious moral righteousness of the English in favour of the Germans and against the French” would be by evoking an appeal to racial prejudice. McKay declared that the “Black-Troops-On-the-Rhine campaign was the entering wedge of the split between France and British policy, which carried Europe drifting and floundering down the years into another war.”² McKay’s argument is partly accepted by a German historian.

“The Labour Party leaders made speeches which once again proved that they knew the Berlin propaganda tirades by heart. Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson spoke in exactly this vein. Philip Snowden . . . indulged in bitter Francophobia; he said that the Allies treated Germany like a ‘beast’. Even the ‘black shame’ was swallowed. The same politicians and journalists who were ever ready to fight for equal rights for all races, now suddenly found the presence of negro regiments on German soil a provocation.”³

¹ “Literary Supplement”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, III (March, 1922), pp. 137-138; “The International Conference of the Union of Democratic Control at Geneva”, *ibid.*, II (August, 1920), Special Supplement, pp. vi-vii; “What We Think”, *ibid.*, II (August, 1920), p. 18. See also Morel, “Giolitti’s Bill to Abolish Secret Diplomacy”, *ibid.*, II (January, 1921), pp. 101-104.

² Cooper and Reinders, “A Black Briton Comes ‘Home’: Claude McKay in England, 1920”, in: *Race*, IX, pp. 71, 82.

³ Leopold Schwarzschild, *World in Trance*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1943), p. 145.

Morel and others on the British Left were committed to the survival of the Weimar Republic and were convinced that the French, through intent or stupidity, would bring about its demise.¹ There was also the fear that the collapse of the German republic would severely damage the cause of international socialism. British labour, Morel wrote in 1923, should concentrate on "saving Germany from collapse through external aggression [from France] in the interests not only of right and justice but in the interest of the International Labour Movement itself".² There is no direct evidence for McKay's accusation that Morel, Lansbury, and others played on race-sex appeals to arouse British sympathy with the Germans, but this certainly was a result of the campaign. McKay's charge that Anglo-French divisions date from the black troops crusade is questionable; it did however re-enforce antipathies already engendered over German policy.

The fact that the British government appeared to countenance the French use of African troops in Germany must have exacerbated the Left in Great Britain. This was after all the same government which had prosecuted many of the Left during the war and had sentenced Morel himself to prison. Furthermore the powerlessness of the Left, within and without Parliament, undoubtedly led to a kind of rage and frustration in which the Left must have been tempted to use any weapon at hand against the government. This might explain, though it does not make respectable, the tendency of the Left, and Morel in particular, to appeal to prurient and racist feelings.

Morel's campaign reveals that the British Left were part of a social and political milieu in which a cutting analysis and scathing criticism of capitalistic imperialism (including attacks on the colour bar in the colonies) did not exclude racist attitudes. To Morel, and to most of the British intellectual world of 1920, the African was an inferior and he was viewed not as a real person but as a "native" – a stereotype. There is no evidence that Morel actually knew a single Negro except on a master-servant level. When he died not a single coloured man was asked to contribute to his eulogy. Morel's great struggle against Leopold was conducted largely from Liverpool and in the context of contemporary European thought and politics. Morel it is true favoured the maintenance of African customs, he even argued that Mohammedism was preferable to Christianity in Africa, but he could not consider an independent African state as anything more than a dim possibility.³

¹ Morel in Parliament, 163, HC Deb. 5 s. (May 10, 1923), p. 2673; 167 (August 2, 1923), p. 1809.

² Morel, "The Disruption of Germany: A Catastrophe for International Labour", in: *Labour Magazine*, II (November, 1923), p. 298.

³ Wuliger, "The Idea of Economic Imperialism", p. 398.

He knew about pan-Africanism in a vague way, if only through oblique references in his newspaper clippings; he could not seriously envision it as a concept or a happening.¹ The African was a child. He must be kept in his Eden away from the “cruelties, injustices, and stupidities of the European capitalist system . . .”²

¹ Frank Graham, *Children of Slaves* (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 278-279.

² Morel, *Black Man's Burden*, p. 216.